

Local Governance Brief

Policy Journal of the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative

Beyond Elections

Public Participation and Local Decision-making in Central and Eastern Europe



Public participation in local decision-making is the theme of this new issue of the LGB. The articles illuminate the experiences, problems, and solutions that can or cannot make citizens' participation in government easier and more effective in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The region is part of a groundswell of practice that has created more participatory forms of governance around the world. This remaking of governance is evident both in the demand for participation and in the attempts of some local authorities to redesign their institutions and policymaking processes in order to meet the demand. But a nagging dissatisfaction on both sides leads citizens, NGOs, and other civic groups to complain about how local authorities confuse *giving information* on local affairs to the public with *consulting the public* on policies or interventions already largely decided in advance, and finally with truly *participatory processes* of engaging citizens in the early phases of policy or project developments.

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Local Governance Brief

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About LGI

The Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI), publisher of the *Local Governance Brief*, is an international development, policy research, and grant-giving project of the Open Society Institute (OSI). Its mission is to promote democratic and effective government, primarily in Central and South Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. LGI supports public administration reform decentralization, improvement of governance techniques, and public policy formulation.

One of the most challenging issues facing open society in Central and South Eastern Europe, the Newly Independent States, and new countries covered by OSI activities, is effective, democratic governance. Transition offers many examples of weak states that have been captured by small groups who use public power in pursuit of personal advancement. Good governance means that institutions at the central and subnational levels listen to, and consult with, society. This can only happen if state institutions want to engage society, they know how to do so, and they have developed transparent rules and procedures to that effect. Furthermore, citizens require the skills to articulate and lobby their interests.

There is a great deal of social and political learning to be done on both sides of the power divide. Enhancing the capacity of all to work toward solutions to stubborn social problems lies at the heart of LGI's agenda.



Public Participation in Local Decision-making in Central and Eastern Europe

Masha Djordjevic

Introduction

Striking a balance between governor and governed is a quandary in every circumstance of democracy, and local public authorities often complain that citizens are uninterested in putting their effort and time towards engaging with local affairs. However, research shows that citizens often find the existing official channels for making one's voice heard inadequate, unresponsive, and a waste of time.

Local consultations often bring only cosmetic changes to the predetermined interventions of local authorities responsible for undertaking the planning work. Processes around the world show that even when there is a public demand, either from citizen groups or NGOs representing interests of various social groups, public institutions do not know how to respond by making the local decision-making process more participatory as opposed to *ad hoc* initiatives that do not lead to sustainable institutional change.

Public participation in the hands of local decision-makers in the transitional countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been little more than a convenient buzzword for politicians attempting to establish their credentials as democratic reformers. The rhetoric of participation entered the political language of politicians and bureaucrats much faster than any true understanding:

that public participation is necessary to make public policies better, more responsive to local needs, and more easily implemented due to wider public support and a shared responsibility for collaborative decisions. The international donors in the region frequently supported public participation ideas but such donor-driven initiatives often lead to a glut of unrelated local efforts without an overall, genuine public participation strategy about when, how, and to what purpose to invite citizen engagement, and how to incorporate the public response into the institutional procedures.

The articles in this LGB address questions about what is really participatory in the current practices of decision-making across the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and whether there is any evidence of local public institutions opening to more frequent and meaningful citizen input in environmental protection, investments in technical infrastructure, land-use planning, managing multiethnic communities, neighborhood rehabilitation, planning of local budgets, and general development strategy planning. This issue aims to detect the differences and similarities and to identify the challenges to developing truly participatory institutions that lay ahead.

The content of the contributions

The article by Vivien Lowndes and Lawrence Pratchett presents a conceptual tool, CLEAR, for understanding locally specific factors that influence the success of government-developed initiatives to engage citizens in local decision-making processes. CLEAR was developed by British researchers and is being adapted by the Council of Europe as a self-diagnostic tool for local authorities across Europe. Then Tricia Zipfel and John Gaventa explore the example of an advanced democracy like Great Britain and its recent developments in institutionalizing citizen participation through the convergence of agendas for citizen participation and local government reform.

The most developed area in terms of legal regulations and the practice of citizen consultation is environmental policy. We devote two contributions to citizen participation in Environmental Impact Assessment procedures: Marta Struminska's article analyzes the situation in the new member states and Csaba Kiss presents the situation in Hungary; David Toft goes on to describe infrastructure investments planning and its relation to the practice of citizen engagement in the assessment of environmental risks.

Seven successful advocacy NGOs from the region also contribute their experiences and reflections on mobilizing citizens and trying to open the door of public institutions to citizen input in public policy in recent years and they are peppered throughout this issue. Bernard Rorke describes the experience of Roma NGOs in achieving access to the local decision-making processes relevant for Roma citizens.

Two articles from our home city, Budapest, by co-authors Dániel Horváth and Nóra Teller, and another by Gabó Bartha, explain how two district authorities treat citizen engagement in neighborhood rehabilitation planning. These are followed by Kristina Creosteanu's piece on lessons learned in trying to establish participatory budgeting in Romania the personal reflections of Katalin Pallai, a leading practitioner of city development strategies, about the state of citizen participation in strategic planning for local communities.

Some common themes

Some common themes have emerged from the contributions to this issue of the LGB. Is there a trend towards more citizen participation in public decision-

making? Most of the contributors, especially in the interviews, agree that citizen participation in public decisions is widely acknowledged as important, but rarely implemented in practice. In fact, access to local institutions is provided as long as actual citizen influence remains marginal. There is a tendency to engage in more consultations with citizens and civil society organizations, but no tendency to engage citizens in real decision-making, a process that still lacks transparency. The authorities tend to apply participatory procedures only when they need justification for their decisions or when ignoring public input would seriously damage the implementation of a project.

Some contributors argue that there is a tendency to restrict public engagement in some areas where it was allowed or requested in the first wave of liberal regulations enforced under the supervision of the EU or international organizations in the 1990s. This tendency is evident, for example, in the revisions of Environmental Impact Assessment regulations in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania. When citizens question strategic decisions to sell large greenfield areas to investors or for the construction of public roads to benefit special interests, authorities in Poland and Hungary reportedly have resorted to restrictions on public engagement. Thus, achieving some public access in some policy fields may in effect shut the door to more strategic decisions by government and political institutions scared of too much public debate.

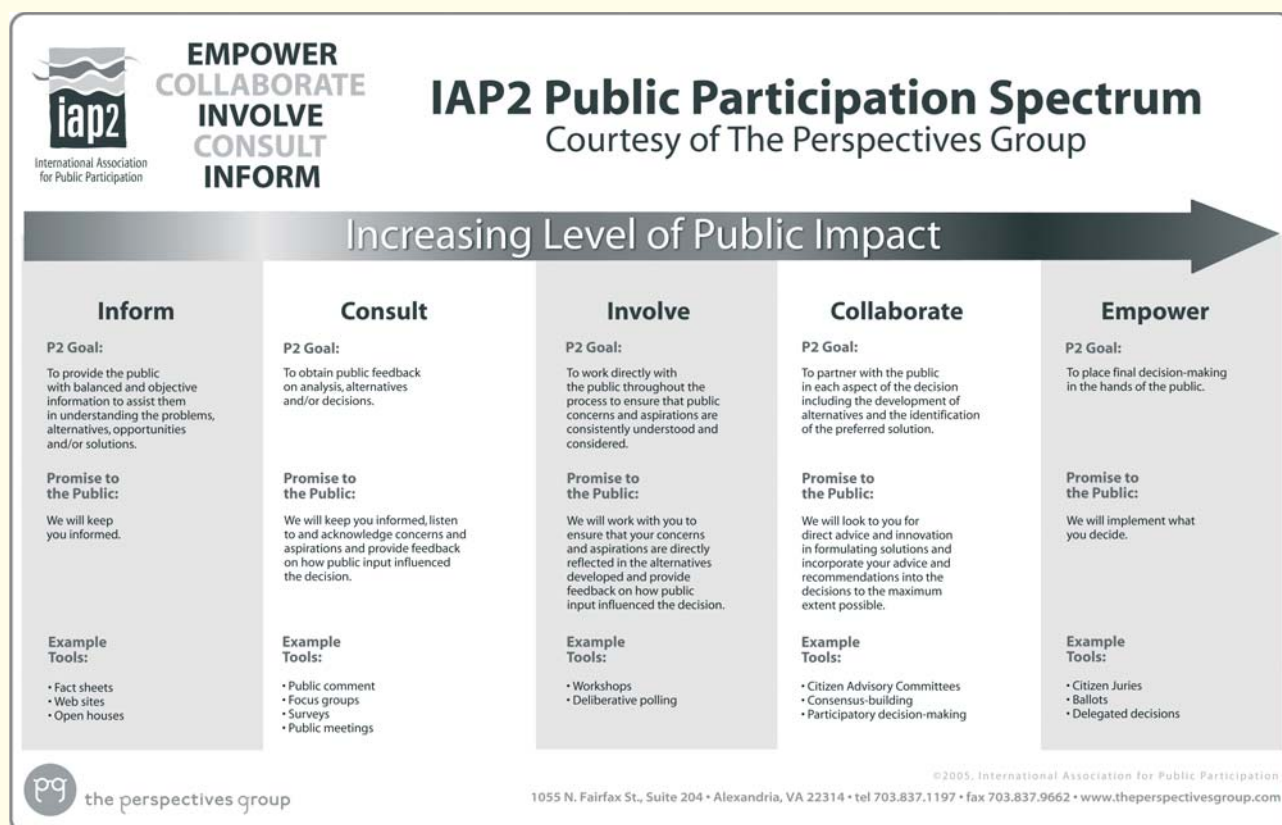
Getting access to the right information and explaining any government decisions so that normal citizens can understand their potential consequences and effect on everyday life are still a major challenge. Two problems hamper public participation: a lack of understanding of each and every aspect of government decision-making and a lack of knowledge about the procedural rights that allow the general public to be involved in the process. Such information frequently is released too little, too late in the process of elaborating a decision. The situation is made worse by the fact that citizens often do not understand how government works. Nor do they understand how certain decisions affect their interests and the general public interest. As a result, they are discounted by government, and most procedures for public engagement are designed as consultation with experts. Little effort is made to put information into everyday language and seek the input of ordinary citizens.

As many contributors point out, officials often rely on passive dissemination of information, like posting

on the Internet or public information boards, instead of going out and engaging with their citizens. Only a limited number of citizen-participation tools are actually in use in the regions, even in those municipalities where local authorities are more broadminded, regularly releasing information and consulting in various public forums. Postings, surveys, and hearings are practically the sole methods used to engage the public in local matters. In some cases, vague legal regulations mention only public hearings as a method of soliciting input. Even willing local authorities are obstructed by a lack of knowledge about how to design effective participatory processes on a regular basis, how to reach out to different social groups, and how to integrate public participation processes into their institutional culture and regulatory procedures for making public decisions.

Another common complaint is that local authorities fail to explain how citizen input was incorporated into the final decision, whether it was accepted or rejected in the process. In line with the CLEAR conceptual and self-diagnostic tool, citizen engagement cannot be sustained if the decision and any conflicting views are not explained. Without a response from authorities, citizens feel that their input is a waste of time—not just rejected but dumped into a black hole by a disinterested local bureaucracy.

Many authors emphasize the variety of conditions needed to improve the institutionalization of public participation in local decision-making above and beyond the current obstacles. Specific legislation elaborating on citizens' rights to be informed and involved in decision-making and adequate procedural rules are not improving the practice *per se*, but without them, there is no mechanism to push local authorities to take public participation seriously. The British case, an advanced democracy with a long tradition of volunteerism and citizen engagement, introduces the newly legislated statutory duty for local authorities to “inform, consult, and involve” citizens and communities in decisions that affect their lives—and this obligation has been provided with the resources and budgets to succeed. Making citizen engagement a statutory duty, not a matter of goodwill and passive invitation, is essential to advancing the practice of public participation. A favorable legal environment should be coupled with a knowledgeable public and whatever assistance they may need in understanding how to participate. This requires awareness building, information analysis skills, and empowerment, especially of vulnerable groups. Building resources and reserving funds to mobilize the public requires plenty of time and money. Resources are needed not just on the side of civil organizations, but also on



the side of public authorities. Changing the attitude, behaviors, and skills of local civil servants is essential if participatory procedures are to have any impact.

Advancing democratic governance by bringing citizens into policymaking

During the initial transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, the focus was on introducing and stabilizing the institutions of representative democracy. But large numbers of ordinary citizens remained distant from the establishment, dissatisfied with the political elites and political parties running government institutions and withdrawn from political life by the demands of daily survival of their families. From the point of view of ordinary citizens, politicians, public servants, and policy experts of all kinds play their own games irrespective of the real needs of the local population. Sustaining this weak form of democratic practice, combined with the population's disassociation from the channels where real decisions take place, is highly detrimental for the future.

Another danger is state capture whereby a few resourceful interest groups control the state's agenda in a given policy area and promote their interests through informal access to decision-makers. State capture is often a consequence of a lack of a strategy for wider citizen engagement, inadequate design of decisional processes, even if on paper there is official willingness to engage nongovernmental stakeholders, and no explanation of

how different citizen and stakeholders' inputs were taken into account. As opposed to *ad hoc*, insufficient, vague initiatives to solicit public input, institutionalized forms of participation that aim to constantly improve outreach to different social groups can prevent state capture. Clear participatory procedures ensure that citizen voices are listened to, taken into account and responded to, and conflicts are mediated, not ignored. Engaging citizens in the early stages of decision-making is one of the major factors that contribute to public confidence in local public institutions.

Civil society organizations frequently advance the role of citizen education in order to raise the ability of local citizens and NGOs to take part in and connect with local decisions. Civil society organizations advocating for unrestricted access to public information and transparency of public decision-making and budget spending can help advance the practice of public participation by mobilizing citizens to react to local authorities who choose to ignore any public consultation. However, opening the door does not guarantee that authorities will know how to sustain the process of giving regular access to the public and how to expand the participation to other groups. In general, gaining access does not lead to the sustainability of public engagement or its redesign. Therefore, it is paramount to help the public sector change its ways and replace the old decisions "behind closed doors" with regular, open consultations with the public regarding the decisions that affect them the most. A whole variety of mechanisms are available for achieving this goal and this issue of the LGB highlights some of them.

CLEAR: Understanding Citizen Participation in Local Government—and How to Make it Work Better

Vivien Lowndes and Lawrence Pratchett

The CLEAR model

Governments across the world, especially at the local level, are experimenting with different ways to engage citizens in decision-making (Smith 2005). The nature and purpose of these initiatives vary greatly but they all “aspire to deepen the ways in which ordinary people can effectively participate in and influence policies which directly affect their lives” (Fung and Wright 2003: 5). However, what works well in one place cannot necessarily be repeated in other locations. Many locally specific factors shape the implementation and validity of officially sponsored participation initiatives.

The academic literature is littered with accounts of what can go wrong in participation initiatives. This article presents a diagnostic tool—the CLEAR model—that both anticipates obstacles to empowerment and links these to policy responses.¹ Based upon case studies of participation practices in contrasting English localities (Lowndes *et al.* 2006a), the model identifies five factors that underpin citizens’ response to participation (Lowndes *et al.* 2006b). According to the CLEAR model, the five factors determining effective citizen participation are as follows:

1 The CLEAR tool was developed in collaboration with Gerry Stoker, University of Southampton.

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<i>Can do</i>	—	citizens have the resources and knowledge to participate
<i>Like to</i>	—	citizens have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation
<i>Enabled to</i>	—	citizens are provided with the opportunity for participation
<i>Asked to</i>	—	citizens are mobilized through public agencies and civic channels
<i>Responded to</i>	—	citizens see evidence that their views have been considered

The CLEAR model was adapted for international use at the request of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR). Since the spring of 2006, the CDLR organized two waves of testing, with the aim of developing the most effective self-diagnostic tool for local governments of the member states of the Council of Europe. Self-evaluation using the CLEAR model allows each municipality to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of their own public participation initiatives. Municipalities are able to examine in detail the context and fit of their existing practices, and to reflect upon how these might be changed to improve participation. CLEAR does not promote a blueprint or "ideal type." It recognizes that participation strategies need to be sensitive to local contexts and dynamic over time.

The CLEAR model prompts a reflective evaluation of current practice. Which of the five factors are being addressed in current initiatives? Which factors have not received sufficient attention? How can the links between the five factors be improved in developing more strategic responses to the challenge of citizen participation? Do

changing contexts require municipalities to re-prioritize the attention paid to different factors?

Table 1 presents the CLEAR model. It summarizes the five participation factors and sets out an indicative set of policy responses. The five factors are now considered in more detail.

CAN DO

"Can do" refers largely to arguments about socio-economic status, which have traditionally dominated explanations for variations in participation rates (Verba *et al.* 1995). The claim is that when people have the appropriate skills and resources they are more able to participate. These skills range from the ability and confidence to speak in public or write letters, to the capacity to organize events and encourage others of similar mind to support initiatives. Access to the resources that facilitate such activities is also important (resources ranging from photocopying facilities to Internet access and so on). These skills and resources are much more commonly found among the better

Table 1. Factors Promoting Participation: It's CLEAR

KEY FACTOR	HOW IT WORKS	POLICY TARGETS
Can do	The individual resources that people have to mobilize and organize (speaking, writing and technical skills, and the confidence to use them) make a difference	Capacity building, training and support of volunteers, mentoring, leadership development
Like to	To commit to participation requires an identification with the public entity that is the focus of engagement	Civil renewal, citizenship, community development, community cohesion, neighborhood working, social capital
Enabled to	The civic infrastructure of groups and umbrella organizations makes a difference because it creates or blocks an opportunity structure for participation	Investing in civic infrastructure and community networks, improving channels of communication via compacts
Asked to	Mobilizing people into participation by asking for their input can make a big difference	Public participation schemes that are diverse and reflexive
Responded to	When asked people say they will participate if they are listened to (not necessarily agreed with) and able to see a response	A public policy system that shows a capacity to respond—through specific outcomes, ongoing learning, and feedback

educated and employed sections of the population: those of higher socio-economic status. However, none of the requisite skills and resources is exclusively the property of a high socio-economic status. It is possible for public, voluntary or community bodies to intervene to make up for socio-economic limitations in equipping citizens with the skills and resources for participation. “Can do” can be delivered by capacity-building efforts aimed at ensuring that citizens are given the support to develop the skills and resources needed for them to engage.

LIKE TO

“**Like to**” rests on the idea that people’s sense of being part of something encourages them to engage. If you feel excluded or sense that you are not welcome, you may decide not to participate. If participation is seen as just for old people or for men, others may not feel comfortable or able to join in. A sense of trust, connection, and linked networks can, according to the social capital argument, enable people to work together and cooperate more effectively (Putnam 2000). A sense of community can be a strong motivator for participation. But given the inherent diversity in many communities then, conversely, an absence of identity or a sense of being an outsider can militate against participation. This factor can also be addressed by policymakers and nongovernmental practitioners seeking to promote participation (Lowndes and Wilson 2001). The most important initial step in diagnosis is to gain an understanding of the sense of loyalties and identities held in various communities. It is not easy to manipulate or change these feelings held about the communities in which people live but it is possible to give people the opportunity to believe that they are part of a wider civic identity built around their locality or some sense of equal and shared citizenship. Recognizing and promoting a sense of civic citizenship and community cohesion can help develop an environment in which people would like to participate.

ENABLED TO

“**Enabled to**,” as a factor in participation, is premised on the research observation that most participation is facilitated through groups or organizations (Parry *et al.* 1992, Pattie *et al.* 2004). Political participation in isolation is more difficult and less sustainable (unless an individual is highly motivated) than the mutually reinforcing engagement of contact through groups and

networks. Collective participation provides continuous reassurance and feedback that the cause of engagement is relevant and that participation has some value. Indeed, for some, engagement in this manner is more important than the outcome of such participation. The existence of networks and groups which can support participation and which can provide a route to decision-makers, therefore, is vital to the vibrancy of participation in an area. Research shows the relevance of civic infrastructures to facilitating or inhibiting participation (Lowndes *et al.* 2006a). Where the right range and variety of groups exists to organize participation, there tends to be more of it. Umbrella organizations that can support civic, community, and voluntary groups can play a particularly important role in providing and sustaining the context for the appropriate types of groups and participation platforms to emerge. They can help groups become established, provide networks of contacts and information, explain how to campaign, and engage and ease access to the relevant decision-makers.

ASKED TO

“**Asked to**” builds on the findings of much research that mobilization matters. People tend to become engaged more often and more regularly when they are asked to engage. Research shows that people’s readiness to participate often depends upon whether or not they are approached and how they are approached (Verba *et al.* 1995). Mobilization can come from a range of sources, but the most powerful form is when those responsible for a decision ask others to engage with them in making the decision. Research shows that the degree of openness of political and managerial systems has a significant effect, with participation increasing where there is a variety of invitations and opportunities (Lowndes *et al.* 2006a). The variety of participation options for engagement is important because some people are more comfortable with some forms of engagement, such as a public meeting, while others would prefer, for example, to engage through online discussions (Lowndes *et al.* 2001a). Some people want to talk about the experiences of their community or neighborhood while others want to engage based on their knowledge of a particular service as a user.

The nature of “the ask” is also important. Participation can be mobilized by the use of incentives (e.g., honoraria), through establishing a sense of obligation (as in the case of jury duty), or by offering bargains/exchanges (where participation is accompanied by

investment or an enhanced service package). The focus of the “ask” is also important. It could be directed at a particular neighborhood or a larger cross-authority population. The sustainability of participation is relevant: can the “ask” be sustained and will citizens keep responding? Who is being asked is another issue. There is a dilemma between developing “expert citizens” and rotating/sampling involvement to get at “ordinary citizens.” The “asked to” factor asks municipalities to address the range and the repertoire of their initiatives? How do they appeal to different citizen groups?

RESPONDED TO

“Responded to” captures the idea that for people to participate on a sustainable basis they have to believe that their involvement is making a difference and is achieving positive benefits. This factor provides simultaneously the most obvious but also the most difficult factor in enhancing political participation (Lowndes *et al.* 2001b).

For people to participate they have to believe that they are going to be listened to and, if not always agreed with, are at least in a position to see that their views have been taken into account. Meeting the challenge of the “responded to” factor means asking public authorities how they weigh messages from various consultation or participation events against other inputs to the decision-making process? How are the different or conflicting views of various participants and stakeholders to be prioritized? Responsiveness is about ensuring feedback, which may not be positive—in the sense of accepting the dominant view from participants. Feedback involves explaining how the decision was made and the role of participation within that. Response is vital for citizen education, and so has a bearing on the “front end” of the process too. Citizens need to learn to live with disappointment: participation won’t always “deliver” on immediate concerns, but remains important. Citizens’ confidence in the participation process cannot be premised upon “getting their own way.” Indeed,

The Council of Europe and CLEAR

The Council of Europe has undertaken two waves of testing of the CLEAR model as the self-diagnostics tool for municipalities to assess democratic participation of citizens within the municipal borders. Used as a self-diagnostic tool for municipalities, CLEAR was tested for its validity and implementability under the leadership of municipal authorities. The purpose of the testing was to improve the diagnostic tool and not to compare the results across countries and municipalities participating in the testing. The only Central and East European countries that participated were Slovakia (in the first testing) and Bulgaria (in the second testing).

In the first wave of testing undertaken in the first half of 2006, pilot municipalities from Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia and Spain participated. The first version of the tool can be found at:

[www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/main_bodies/sub-committees/lr-dp/LR-DP\(2006\)1_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/main_bodies/sub-committees/lr-dp/LR-DP(2006)1_EN.pdf)

And the country reports, including the report from testing in Slovakia, can be found at:

www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/Main_Bodies/Conference_Specialised_Ministers/ConferenceTampere.asp#TopOfPage

In the second wave of testing that took place in late 2007 and early 2008, pilot municipalities in Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Norway and Spain participated. The second version of the CLEAR tool is available at:

[www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/main_bodies/sub-committees/lr-dp/LR-DP\(2008\)9_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/main_bodies/sub-committees/lr-dp/LR-DP(2008)9_EN.pdf)

The general report on the second wave of testing, including country reports is available at:

[www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/main_bodies/sub-committees/lr-dp/LR-DP\(2008\)1_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/main_bodies/sub-committees/lr-dp/LR-DP(2008)1_EN.pdf)

ensuring responsiveness depends upon the quality of elected representatives and democratic leadership. Improving deliberation and accountability mechanisms within “mainstream democracy” is a precondition for effective empowerment strategies.

Conclusions

The CLEAR diagnostic tool enables policymakers to look at citizens and ask questions about their capacities, their sense of community and their civic organizations. It also asks them to examine their own organizational and decision-making structures and assess whether they have the qualities that allow them to listen to, and take account of, messages from citizen participation.

To apply the tool requires three stages of activity. The first involves refining the questions and challenges to be addressed in any particular setting. The second rests on a commitment to a multi-perspective evaluation of the state of citizen participation in the municipality. This means not relying on public officials’ assessment of the five factors, but “triangulating” this with the views of activist and nonactivist citizens, community groups and local politicians. The third involves coming to a judgment about priorities in terms of the factors that need to be addressed, and how.

The first flush of enthusiasm for citizen participation is behind us. The CLEAR model enables policymakers and practitioners to reflect on their current practice and analyze the obstacles to engaging citizens and how they might be overcome. Getting people to participate is not a simple task. There are blocks that stem from a lack of capacity to participate or a lack of engagement with political organizations or issues. Long-term measures can address these blocks, but building community capacity or a sense of citizenship are not challenges from which policymakers can expect easy or quick results. Deep-seated structural factors are clearly at work in shaping people’s resources and attitudes. But the behavior of politicians and managers is also important—and here change is more straightforwardly in the hands of policymakers. If we ask people to participate in a committed and consistent manner and respond effectively to their participative inputs, they are far more likely to engage.

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Making the Most of the Policy Moment: Citizen Engagement in the UK

Tricia Zipfel and John Gaventa

The United Kingdom has been at the forefront of innovative governance policies for well over 30 years. Lately, public participation has come to represent a broader approach to local governance, one that centers on communities and thus brings together all the stakeholders at the local level as they seek to address problems and needs that concern them in a cohesive yet autonomous manner.

Introduction

Over the past decade, around the world, there has been an explosion of interest in more participatory forms of governance. This has happened partly in response to demands from citizens to have more say in decisions that matter to them; but it also reflects a growing recognition, by those in power, that community involvement is essential to revitalizing democracy, improving service delivery, tackling poverty, and building strong communities.

The need to address these complex issues has led to a shift in thinking from narrow ideas of *local government* to broader concepts of *community governance*, in which multiple actors play a part in public policy and the

delivery of public services at the neighborhood, local government, and even national levels.

In the United Kingdom, as in many other countries, there has been increasing recognition of the need for a policy framework that supports citizen engagement in local governance. In October 2006, the Department of Communities and Local Government published its Local Government White Paper, entitled “Strong and Prosperous Communities,” which emphasized the importance of strong local leadership, empowered citizens, and responsive services. In 2007 these initiatives were advanced by the new secretary of state for communities and local government, Hazel Blears, through her Action Plan for Community Empowerment. And in October 2007, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act was approved by Parliament, with new

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obligations for public officials to “inform, consult and involve” citizens and communities.

Many people believe that current policy developments in the UK represent a “unique policy moment” in the history of citizen and community participation, yet more must be done to translate the opportunities presented by these new initiatives into reality. In so doing, much can be learned from international experiences on citizen engagement in local governance. This paper briefly summarizes the current UK policy opportunities, and highlights the key findings from an international gathering of the Champions of Participation in June 2007 in Britain.¹

A new policy moment in the UK?

Background to the UK context

The recent legislation introducing a statutory requirement on local authorities to involve communities in decision-making, a detailed Action Plan for Community Empowerment, and the findings of the Councillors Commission² all reflect a significant shift in thinking about local governance in the UK.

The most recent developments build on changes over the past ten years that have strengthened community involvement in order to tackle poverty, address social exclusion, and improve public services. As a result, local government now routinely consults citizens about services and other issues. The community and voluntary sector is included in local partnership arrangements alongside local authorities and other public sector bodies. And since 2001, the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal,³ in the most deprived areas, has pioneered ambitious renewal projects that aim to put “communities in the driving seat.” In addition, the government has promoted “active citizenship,” encouraging volunteering and involvement in a range of civic duties.

There is now widespread recognition that citizens and communities bring valuable knowledge and expertise to the policy process and participation has become accepted good practice. On the ground, many communities have risen to the challenge and worked hard to turn around their neighborhoods. Involvement in local strategic partnerships (see box on page 15) has meant working with public sector providers to address issues of common concern and has led to more collaborative relationships and a sense of shared

responsibility. Overall levels of citizen involvement have increased such that, by 2005, only 18 percent of people said they were not involved in any sort of formal or informal volunteering or civic duty.⁴ The effect of all this has been to challenge the skeptics and to open up the possibility of more innovative forms of participation and empowerment.

What drives this agenda?

There are a number of factors reflecting public and policy concerns about:

- *the “democratic deficit”*: turnout in local elections, especially in poor areas, is possibly lower than it has ever been; politicians are generally not trusted and people feel that those in power do not listen—most say they want to have a say in the decisions that affect them, but very few feel they have any influence at all.
- *perceptions of public services*: people continue to express dissatisfaction with public services, despite year-on-year improvements in nearly 80 percent of authorities and efforts to empower citizens as service users.
- *community cohesion*: most of Britain’s cities are now home to hugely diverse populations, including well-established ethnic minority communities as well as more recent refugee and economic migrant communities.
- *social exclusion/poverty*: the gap between the poorest communities and the rest of Britain continues to grow, leaving many families locked in intergenerational poverty and specific groups marginalized and potentially alienated from society.

1 Countries were: China, Philippines, India, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway, the United States, plus 24 participants from the UK. A full report of this workshop, entitled “Champions of Participation: Engaging Citizens in Local Governance” is available at http://www.ids.ac.uk/UserFiles/File/news/2008/Champions_Report.pdf. The workshop was organized by the Institute of Development Studies with support from CLG, DFID, and IDEA.

2 “Representing the Future: The Report of the Councillors Commission” December 2007. Available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/councillorscommission/publications/representingthefuture/>.

3 National Strategy for Renewal—see <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk>.

4 CLG (2007) “Citizenship Survey: April–June 2007, England and Wales.”

- *complex problems*: some of the most pressing problems facing society cannot be solved by government alone. Issues like climate change or child obesity, for example, cannot simply be tackled by service improvements; they also require citizens to engage with the issues and make significant changes in their lifestyles.
 - *limits to choice*: in the past, participation has been linked to service improvements and empowerment to greater individual choice. People have been treated as consumers of public services rather than as active citizens, helping to shape those services. But, especially where budgets are tight, there are limits to the “choice agenda,” and unless carefully managed, can have perverse effects on local communities.
- The issues listed above have served to reinforce the importance of participatory ways of working that treat people first and foremost as active citizens engaged in collective decision-making and able to contribute to, as well as benefit from, local government and service provision. These now have been backed up by a number of new policy opportunities, including the Local Government White Paper, the CLG Action Plan for Community Empowerment, and the convergence of participation and local governance reform.
- a new statutory duty for councils and other public authorities to “inform, consult, and involve” communities in the design, delivery, and assessment of services;
 - a stronger voice for citizens and communities to shape the places where they live and the services they receive—e.g., through local charters and, with their local councilors, use of petitions and a community call for action;
 - encouragement for local councils to provide stronger and more strategic leadership in the locality, especially through partnership working and more joined-up services;
 - a stronger role for local councilors in consulting with their communities and holding the council executive to account;
 - reduced central government requirements so that councils and their partners can respond better to local demands and circumstances;
 - a new, simpler performance management and assessment framework that emphasizes citizen satisfaction and community engagement;
 - simplified procedures to set up elected parish, town or neighborhood councils with delegated powers, thus supporting the development of a lower tier of governance;
 - encouragement to extend neighborhood management, devolved service delivery, and new participatory methods, such as participatory budgeting and community planning;
 - new funding to enable communities to take on the management or ownership of local facilities and assets.

The Local Government White Paper

In 2006 the government set out an agenda for local government reform linked to a stronger role for local communities.⁵ The White Paper, “Strong and Prosperous Communities,” addressed the disconnect between people and politics and introduced a package of reforms that aimed to:

- give a stronger voice to citizens and communities to shape the places where they live and the services they receive;
- encourage local authorities to provide stronger and more strategic leadership for the places they serve and represent;
- reduce central prescription so local authorities and their partners are better able to respond to local needs and demands.

Specific commitments in the White Paper included the following:

The Public Involvement Act and the Action Plan for community empowerment

Since 2007 these policies have been taken forward by Hazel Blears, MP, the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. She has long been a strong advocate for community empowerment and participation. In October 2007, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act was approved by Parliament, which means that from 2009 onwards all local authorities will be required to “inform, consult,

⁵ “Strong and Prosperous Communities” (October 2006) Local Government White Paper. CLG.

and involve” citizens and communities in decisions that affect their lives and their neighborhoods.⁶ A range of new powers and tools are being introduced, supported by a budget of GBP 35 million, over three years, to implement this Action Plan. In the future, local authority performance will be assessed against a simplified framework that emphasizes participation and asks citizens whether they feel they can influence the decisions that matter to them. The aim is to develop a cross-government approach to empowerment over the coming months.

Convergence of participation and local government reform

One of the most interesting developments in the UK has been the convergence of the agendas for local government reform and community empowerment. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal raised the bar by empowering some of the poorest communities through innovative projects, directly funded by central government.⁷ But they were time-limited and the intention was always to mainstream these new ways of working within local authority and local strategic partnership practice.

Alongside neighborhood renewal, the government has introduced measures to strengthen the position of local authorities, simplify the funding they receive from central government, and redefine the role of local councilors as community leaders. The “grand design” is to devolve power and responsibility to local authorities and beyond that to neighborhoods, thus increasing the potential for local solutions, greater flexibility, and better dialogue between citizens and those in positions of power. Although in this scenario central government will step back, leaving space for local solutions to emerge, the statutory duty to involve and the performance assessment framework provide some leverage to ensure that local authorities do respond positively in engaging citizens and communities in decision-making.

6 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (October 2007).

7 For example, the New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, Community Empowerment Networks. Further information available at: <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/> and also <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/>.

Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements

Every local authority in the UK is expected to have a local strategic partnership (LSP) that brings together the council, police, health, other public sector bodies, the community and voluntary sectors, and the business community. The new act establishes a “duty to cooperate” on the partners, thus reinforcing the importance of joint problem-solving and collaborative working. Each year the LSP must set out its priorities, its delivery plan, and detailed implementation strategy in a local area agreement that is approved by central government. In order to maximize the scope for local flexibility, the number of national priorities that need to be addressed has been significantly reduced, and previously ring-fenced funding programs have been merged into a single block grant. A significant change for local communities and voluntary sector groups is that, as partners in the LSP, they must now negotiate their funding as part of the local area agreement settlement, rather than relying on grants provided directly from central government.

Challenges and issues in the UK context

These recent policy developments have put community empowerment high on the government’s agenda for changing the way the public sector relates to citizens in the UK. They are significant in that they:

- provide statutory support for citizen engagement, making it more of a right and responsibility, rather than participation “by invitation”;
- expand the scope of engagement from particular “neighborhoods” to whole communities and councils; and
- shift the debate from how citizens participate to how governments support their engagement.

How this policy framework plays out at the local authority level, over the coming years, will be crucial. The context is extremely positive but there are many challenges. These issues resonate with experience in many other countries.

For locally elected members:

- The relationship between *local councilors* and the communities they represent will need to change. To maintain credibility, councilors will need to “go deeper” into local communities, champion their priorities, and use the scrutiny role to increase the transparency and accountability of the council and other services.
- They will also need to respect the roles of *other community leaders* operating outside the political arena, thus reinforcing the importance of participatory forms of democracy.
- They will need to put *something real on the table* so that local people feel it worth their while to get involved—this often means a devolved budget.

For professionals working within local government:

- The *culture of public sector decision-making* remains hard to shift. There can be resistance from professionals who feel participation slows things down and from politicians who fear they will lose power and status as elected representatives.
- The *demands from central government*, to meet targets or spend budgets to deadline, can cut across a more systematic and considered search for local solutions.
- Too often *champions of participation* within local government, who play a key role in building trust with local communities, move on to new policy initiatives leaving a gap that is not always easy to fill.

Opportunities for involvement create demands on local communities:

- Partnership working can put huge *pressures on community representatives* who may feel unsupported and treated as unequal partners.
- They are expected to deal with strategic as well as local issues, come to grips with *complex problems* and processes, and reflect the diverse views of their community to the partnership in an honest and inclusive way.
- They also need to be able to mediate between their communities and public sector organizations, somehow managing a difficult balance of *insider and outsider roles*—not easy to do, especially where community organizations are fragile, under-

resourced, or locked into a “them and us” opposition mindset.

Finally, central government needs to find effective ways to support change:

- They need to understand that this is a *complex agenda* that will take time to implement—so providing a policy lead is crucial but not enough.
- There is the *question of resources* to support new forms of participation and empowerment. In the UK, until 2006, community and voluntary sector organizations relied on central government funding. However in line with devolved decision-making, they must now seek funding from their local partnerships, persuading other partners of the value of participation and the need to invest in local communities.
- In addition to leadership, government needs to *provide guidance* on “how” to make participation work and *exercise leverage* where local government fails to deliver reforms and communities struggle to get support.

The Policy Moment: International Experience and Lessons

These challenges resonate with the experience of “champions of participation” from around the world, some of whom gathered in the UK in June 2007 to discuss these issues. At this event the participants developed a series of policy “lessons.”

Lesson 1: Citizen engagement is not only about getting policy right, though this is important.

It also involves paying attention to the pre-conditions for community participation from the very beginning, including:

- taking time to understand the community;
- listening carefully to what people say about the issues that matter;
- strengthening local capacities for engagement; and
- being honest and realistic about what can be done, not building false hopes.

Lesson 2: Citizen engagement is not just “business as usual.”

It also requires:

- changing mindsets, overcoming resistance, and challenging power relations;
- finding the right champions inside and outside government and building alliances across different groups;
- not underestimating the importance of small actions and mobilization at the community level; and
- building strong independent civil society organizations that can exercise a strong authentic community voice and hold government to account.

Lesson 3: Citizen engagement is not only about well-designed and inclusive processes.

It also requires strong political will and leadership, including:

- the buy-in of local councilors, local authorities, and other agencies;
- clear communication and transparency about each participatory process; and
- a duty to include people who are not at the table.

Lesson 4: Citizen engagement is not just another “add-on” to already overworked agencies and authorities.

It involves:

- re-examining and changing administrative processes that may not support participation;
- finding resources to enable time, training and well-designed processes; and
- addressing issues of organizational culture, to enable local governments to listen and become genuine partners with communities.

Lesson 5: Citizen engagement cannot be “produced” simply from above or below alone.

Coordinated action is required at every level, from central to local government, and from local government to local communities by:

- creating spaces where voices can connect openly and transparently across the levels;
- re-balancing power towards the local; and
- establishing clear minimum standards, designed through a participatory process, which can be used for public scrutiny or performance.

Lesson 6: Citizen engagement is not a quick win, easily reduced to targets and timetables.

It must be sustained over time through:

- institutional and community-wide ownership, not only individual initiative;
- a balance of immediate results and long-term commitment;
- ongoing learning and improvement based on experience; and
- remembering previous promises and following through on them.

In a number of other countries initial enthusiasm for new policy initiatives has increased participation. But this enthusiasm for engagement has waned if, after several years, obstacles to engagement have not been overcome and the promise of substantive change has not been realized. The hope is that the UK will be able to do things differently, and that it will learn from the lessons of citizen engagement in local governance internationally.

Further lessons from the Champions of Participation workshop and the new Resource Pack can be found at: www.ids.ac.uk/index.cfm?objectid=996A77E0-DDAD-90E4-A2B4BA0D49EACB08

Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making

Marta Struminska

Public participation is neither unsavory nor a threat, though some local governments view it as both. However, public participation now attaches to movements to implement a number of social and civil rights that are assumed to be part of the fabric of modern European constitutional democracies. This article asks what can public participation do to enhance environmental policymaking? Will public participation help or hinder efforts to conserve or develop resources? How have institutions in the region adopted the new “rules” or sought to avoid them?

Introduction

A growing call for public involvement in environmental decision-making is part of a broader process aimed at increasing public participation in decision-making in all significant areas of the public sphere. In other words, it is part of what Pateman identified in 1970 as the creation of participatory democracy. Determinants of this process sometimes have been identified as the illegitimacy of the traditional decision-making processes, manifested in the crises of the traditional parliamentary democracy. Also, changing public expectations and declining public confidence in the process that develops policy decisions

has undermined the rules of the coalition between politicians, business, and experts (Beck 2005). “There is a move away from an elitist model of which expert advice acts as the authoritative source for regulation to one in which citizens have a voice in framing government decisions” (Rowe and Frewer 2004: 512).

This issue can be analyzed in the framework of Ralf Dahrendorf’s theory of citizenship that claims growing citizens rights—from civil through political and social to the so-called second generation of rights connected to the right to be free from discrimination as well as rights connected with environmental safety—broadly speaking, to human rights regarding democracy. It

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seems that the common feature of the second generation of civil rights is that they are the consequence of shifting some issues from the private to the public sphere.

The social interpretation of environmental issues has changed, too. The simultaneous development of civil rights rhetoric created the already-mentioned legitimization gap. One of the possible ways to reduce the gap has been the introduction of public participation procedures in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations or institutions responsible for policy development in many areas like healthcare, transportation, and environment. Public participation may mean public involvement in decision-making processes on various levels and in different ways. In a broader sense, the public can participate by being the recipient of information from the governing bodies; public opinion may be sought (e.g., through questionnaires or focus groups); or its representatives may participate in the decision-making process as an advisory committee (Rowe and Frewer 2000). Some researchers consider only the latter form as participative, arguing that real participation requires empowerment and direct input in the decision process (Arnstein 1969).

Many authors indicate that participation procedures serve a more pragmatic purpose than the implementation of democratic rights: they provide a kind of safety valve to politicians and officials of different levels. However, implementing public participation procedures without the intent of respecting information gathered from the public is not only counterproductive (Rowe and Frewer 2004) in terms of the effective implementation of policy or projects, but it also may increase the problem of poor legitimization because of the waste of social capital and social trust. This kind of façade over decision-making activities is especially common in the situation where participative procedures, representing a specific set of values and norms (like inclusiveness, transparency, etc.), are introduced into an environment traditionally characterized with an incompatible set of norms and values and the commonly adopted behavior patterns (institutions) connected with them. One can assume that due to historical experiences the post-communist countries have developed a specific institutional environment not necessarily friendly towards these kind of values.

Due to the non-participatory tradition of central planning, the lack of approval of social conflicts and the denial of their existence in socialist society resulted in the underdevelopment of institutions that coordinate and negotiate antagonistic interests. Environmental

regulations, and particularly those concerning access to information and public participation in decision-making, were brought to the post-communist countries mainly as an adaptation to European directives and international regulations (like the Aarhus Convention¹ or Rio de Janeiro Declaration). As the neo-institutionalists say, “institutions don’t travel well,” because of differentiated socio-cultural contexts. The most significant factors common in the post-communist countries, influencing the functioning of different kinds of the participatory processes are threefold: the nongovernmental sector is still generally weak in moderating the dialog between communities, local authorities, and developers lobbying for new investments; low consumer and civil consciousness is matched with the lack of readiness on the part of individuals to voice their demands and expectations towards public institutions; and even when regulations are in place, they are often ambiguous, their execution is slow, and it often does not take place fully.

Public participation in environmental decision-making in selected European countries

From 2004–2006, the implementation of the public participation procedures in environmental decision-making became an object of an assessment conducted within The Access Initiative (TAI) project.² Countries assessed within the context of this project included Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, and Ukraine. The TAI methodology assesses public participation on two levels: the policy and project level. In European TAI assessments, decision-making on 34 policies and 17 projects from nine different countries has been investigated to give an overview of participation practice. Policy—national as well as subnational—is defined as: strategies, policies, plans, programs, and laws. Projects are defined as: the execution of construction works or other interventions in the natural surroundings and landscape, including those involving extraction of mineral resources.

1 See Smith, Michael L. (2004) “Environmental Justice Takes Root in CEE Legal System.” *Local Governance Brief*. Summer 2004. Available online at: http://lgi.osi.hu/publications_datasheet-php? =258.

2 Information about the project and research report are accessible at: <http://www.taieurope.com>.

In the regulatory system of the countries concerned, public participation functions mostly as an opportunity for the public to comment on draft decisions, especially on the policy level, which allows the public to make only minor changes to the policy in preparation. Legal norms are typically very general (Hungary is a positive exception in this respect). Project-level public participation is regulated more strongly.

Research shows that, especially on the policy level, public participation is regarded as consultations with experts. A group of specialists is perceived by officials as more legitimate when taking part in the process than any other group. Little effort is vested in putting information into simple language and trying to get input from the general public. Given information lacks a “consequentialist approach”—i.e., information about short- and long-term impacts on health and environment are usually not present, being at the same time the most interesting and relevant for the public. The same problem refers to so-called “supporting information,” referring not only to the project itself but also to: the background of the project; the description of options and their implications for the environment; a complete text of the draft decision; when, where, and how further information will be available; when and how the public can submit comments; and information on what kind of environmental information is available. The communication channel most often used is the Internet, regardless of the fact that in the best case only half of the population of these countries can access this source of information. In Poland, the creation of public registries of emerging legal acts has, in the opinion of NGO representatives, actually reduced public participation, as this has become a substitute for broader public consultation. There was a tendency to disseminate information without having ascertained whether it reached the relevant stakeholders. The same act of posting information on the Internet was rarely advertised.

The negative aspect about public participation is also its lack of transparency. Most of the official documents on the policies do not discuss whether or how public input was incorporated in the decision, and feedback to the public is quite weak.

At the project level, as stated above, public participation is more strongly regulated and established when it is required, with better opportunities for the public to participate. For example, in most cases there appears to be planned and systematic efforts to consult potentially affected parties and several communication tools are used to disseminate information. However, as

in policy-level decision-making, there is a tendency to passive dissemination of information, i.e., posting it on Internet. The weaknesses of public participation on the project level are the lack of communication of information to marginalized socio-economic or cultural groups, and public participation in decisions on renewal, extension, modification, or termination of projects. Very often public participation is done in the course of environmental impact assessments, and laws on this issue are more specific regarding timelines and procedures. Apart from this shortcoming, the quality of information delivered on drafts in researched cases was assessed from average to strong. There was, however, a negative tendency observed in the case of the initiation phase of the participation process. In most cases, only procedural information was available: short background data, information on where further information will be available, and how the public can submit comments. Efforts to submit complete and relevant information undertaken mainly after the first stage of decision-making are limiting participation to, at best, the possibility to comment.

Going beyond environmental issues: Institutionalization

New rules connected with public participation are subject to institutionalization processes. As mentioned previously, in the case of environmental issues we are dealing with forced institutionalization, imposed in the form of legal regulations not necessarily in line with the norms ruling day-to-day practice. Deficiencies in the development of participatory democracy, the low level of consciousness concerning citizens’ rights, and a lack of environmental awareness result in a situation where individuals and groups are not ready to voice their demands and expectations towards politicians and administration. Government representatives at different levels often disregard social agents like NGOs and associations as serious partners for dialogue. It means that citizens’ ability to execute control over the enforcement of law is insufficient. Implementation of the participatory rules as a new institutional solution is shaped and changed over time.

This process can be described as a learning process but also as a fight for power between different social players. One can formulate assumptions that the protests and social conflicts connected to project-level decision-making are the most important factors for

the effective institutionalization of public participation procedures. A lack of knowledge and absence of tradition in the dialogue and transparency of public administration results in the neglect of new procedures and only a minimum effort for their realization. Local communities are often confronted with policies and projects that are already completed or “unavoidable.” The ability of the stakeholders to execute their right to participate depends on their access to specific resources like knowledge and finances. More effective are communities rich in social capital, mainly located in the vicinity of big cities, with a well-educated middle class with good access to independent experts in various areas including law, environmental protection, and health. Pressure from such well-equipped social players results in winning court cases, the halt of unwanted investments, or modifications more or less in line with public expectations. The main costs are to be born by investors, although the responsibility for not complying with the law lies on the side of municipalities. They are obliged to inform citizens and facilitate participation process. In the researched cases of this kind, some interesting developments were observed—for example, enterprises that previously experienced such failures made by a municipality (such as failure to comply with regulations on timely information given to local community) tended to partially take over the realization of the participation procedures from the municipalities and, at the same time, to ensure officials are executing the required procedures.³ There are regions, however, where the risk of effective protests is low due to factors connected with social exclusion, or where people are dependent on a certain economic sector (which also may have a large impact on the environment and health) for jobs or where the pressure on the participation process is not present and, consequently, these plans are either unrealized or realized to the point of deception.

The tendencies mentioned above indicate a relatively low degree of institutionalization of participation procedures. However, a clear obligation stated in legal regulations is a powerful tool, if there is somebody ready and able to use it (which is not always obvious).

The hostile attitude toward public participation among Polish officials and politicians is visible in other (although related) policymaking areas, among them land-use planning. The regulations referring to land-use planning in municipalities are focused on informing the public about already drafted plans—a public debate that is a more active form of participation happens at the same stage of the process, after the drafting activities

are finished. Moreover, a bill on land-use planning introduced in 1994 abolished the obligation to create and present alternative plans of land use that had been incorporated in the land-use bill from 1984. The same bill (from 1994) lacks any elements connected with public participation in the planning stages and was regarded as regressive. But public participation was reintroduced in a new bill in 2003. There are two stages of land-use planning: obligatory land-use studies and non-obligatory and more specific local land-use plans. There are still municipalities that do not have the second type of plan and that enables them to avoid broader participation procedures in the case of investment planning (according to regulations, only immediate neighbors must be informed). Moreover, special kinds of investments, so-called public goal investments, are excluded from participation procedures required in land-use regulations due to their special public importance. Public roads constitute a good example of this where one of the most conflict-fostering elements of public spatial planning is not provided with any conflict-prevention solutions (Kolpiński 2007). It is reflected quite well in decision-makers’ attitudes towards the public participation process—it takes too much time and unnecessarily exposes the experts’ scientific knowledge and its deficiencies to the reasoning abilities of laypersons. These attitudes are strongly connected with the “catching up” process related to the underdevelopment of infrastructure in post-communist countries. But as one of the critics of the bill on land-use planning⁴ put it, “shortcuts sometimes turn into a long journey.” He was referring to social conflicts being the most violent and long lasting in cases where the public administration was trying to make investments without any previous consultation with the public.

Conclusions

This paper suggests that the introduction of public participation procedures can be analyzed in the frame-work of an institutional approach, defining public participation as a new institution imposed on developing and transition countries by global players

3 Research Project “Institutional Determinants of Corporate Social Responsibility” currently being conducted at Leon Kozminski Academy of Entrepreneurship and Management, Warsaw, Poland.

4 Izdebski, Hubert (April 2006) Comment for Parliamentary Commission of Regional Government and Regional Policy.

like the European Union or the United Nations. Either of these institutions seem to be the “foreign body”⁵ in the social structure of such countries. Various social actors influence the shape of a new institution like public participation, and its functioning in the new environment depends to a great extent on the power and control possessed by these actors. If one of these actors—for example, civil society—is too weak to impose and execute the implementation of public participation procedures, then these procedures will fail. It seems that in the case of the environmental decision-making process, public participation is more advanced than in other fields because national and regional governing bodies were forced to implement them in the form of law. As mentioned previously, although in many cases the state’s and civil society’s capacity to enforce public participation is sometimes insufficient, the introduced regulations in specific legal form constitute an important point of reference.

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5 Comparison used by Splawski and Zybortowicz (2005).

Useful Websites 1

Some sources have been taken from the Champions of Participation Online Resource Pack

Civic Practices Network

An excellent source for tools, essays, books and examples of various civic practices. The site is maintained by a consortium of civic practices and participatory citizenship researchers, authors, and practitioners.

www.cpn.org

Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability

The Citizenship DRC is an international network of researchers and activists exploring new forms of citizenship that will help make rights real. The site has a publication search function to access research findings related to active citizenship from 12 different countries since 2001.

www.drc-citizenship.org

Deliberative Democracy Consortium

A resource site for various US democracy initiatives. It serves as the regional partner in North America for LogoLink.

www.deliberative-democracy.net

International Association for Public Participation

An excellent source for networking and information.

www.theperspectivesgroup.com

Local Flavors of a Global Recipe

Csaba Kiss

Through a survey of changes to the laws governing the access of NGOs to litigation in the Hungarian courts, this article shows how a fairly effective legal system can evolve to guarantee that the voice of the public can be heard in environmental policymaking. But this alone does not guarantee meaningful participation by a public dissatisfied and distrustful of everything that is politics. Luckily, NGOs have made education and information available as instruments for the public good.

The public in local environmental decision-making in Hungary

Philosophers, scholars, and intellectuals have long researched what is optimum decision-making and how are the best decisions made in any given state machinery. They have developed diverse approaches depending on what importance they have attributed to the participation of the public in making decisions and whether they have valued participation as something that enriches the aforementioned decisions. Variations range from a fundamentally elite-driven society to regimes of extreme direct democracy.

Paradoxically, a resolution of an international forum, the 1992 Rio Declaration of the United Nations

Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) put an end in its peculiar sense to the debate—at least on environmental matters—by proclaiming in its Principle 10 that “environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level.”

This also gives a prompt answer to the constant question of whether public participation enhances the quality of decisions by simply saying: the best decisions are those that include participatory mechanisms which involve public intervention.

Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration is a fundamental manifestation of good environmental governance. But how does that translate into practice on the local level, in our case in Hungary? Does Principle 10 apply at all on the subnational level?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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In our understanding, when the Principle says “at the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes,” it does not limit participation in the national-level decision-making bodies. On the contrary, it is meant to highlight the difference between international and national levels, the latter encompassing all possible levels of government within the national, such as federal, state, subnational, regional, subregional, and local.

Local governments in Hungary have had a long history of independence since 1990, when the municipal system of the country was based on new foundations. The Local Government Act from the same year provided absolute equality to all local governments and took away regulatory functions from the subnational (county) level municipalities, while it established a complicated system of power sharing in the capital, Budapest. All this resulted in the situation where there are over 3,000 municipalities in Hungary with varying sizes and varying problems, theoretically exercising the same rights, and independent to a large extent of the central government. The municipality of Óbudavár, for instance, having less than 100 inhabitants, has a village council of three, in addition to a directly elected mayor. However, the village does not have its own administrative bureau but is allied with other municipalities of similar size to accommodate one clerk for the area. Nevertheless, this village council can still make its own building regulations, local noise ordinances, local petty offense laws, etc.

So what characterizes the environmental-related decision-making of these smaller and larger municipalities in Hungary as regards public participation?

As an overall diagnosis, we can conclude that municipalities, irrespective of their size, tend to apply exclusive processes for decision-making and only tend to be meaningfully influenced by public opinion in cases where ignoring public input would jeopardize the implementation of a plan or project.

What complicates the picture is that municipalities are treated as something monolithic in the public eye; however, they are made up of distinct components that perform diverse functions.

The three most important “players” within a municipality are the (town, village, or district) council, the mayor, and the clerk. And the three most important functions that arise are local legislation and strategy setting, managing of municipal property, and making resolutions in individual administrative matters. To facilitate an overview of the current system, it is useful to present the competences of their diverse organs in a matrix (Table 1).

Let us see the situation of public participation in each relevant cell of the matrix in each potential decision-making situation depending on which organ of the municipality decides in which of its functions. Certainly, our main focus will be on environmental decisions.

Municipal council adoption of legislation or setting of strategies

Municipal councils are directly elected bodies and have limited legislative sovereignty within the area of the respective local government. They are entitled to make local laws, called municipal decrees, and make municipal resolutions that decide on individual matters of a diverse kind. Such local laws can even be stricter in environmental matters than national ones.

The possible venues where the public can participate in the legislative decision-making of the municipal councils are:

- enacting decrees of environmental significance: according to the Environmental Protection Act of 1995, as amended, Article 46.1.c;
- setting local zoning and building rules: according to the Building Act of 1997, as amended, Article 6.3.a;
- enacting municipal decrees in diverse topics other than environmental: according to the Local

Table 1. Competences of Local Government

PLAYERS \ FUNCTIONS	LEGISLATION AND STRATEGY SETTING	MANAGING MUNICIPAL PROPERTY	ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING
Council	A	B	
Mayor		C	D
Clerk			E

Government Act of 1990, as amended, Article 10.1.a;

- setting local strategies and plans of environmental significance: there are a few strategies and plans that municipal councils adopt by making resolutions not taking the form of local laws. These include the Local Environmental Program and the Smog Alert Plan.

Case 1

The city council of Budapest held a carefully timed session before the 2007 Christmas holiday when the council amended the local decree regulating the management of municipal assets. The process of amendment was not a secretive one; however, environmental CSOs were not informed and no impact assessment was made. The amendment reclassifies forests of Budapest and removes them from a category called “non-negotiable” into a category called “negotiable with limitations.” This simply means that while previously, forests owned by the Budapest Municipality were not allowed to be marketed, now it is possible to sell them with limitations—it is easy to imagine what this will result in. There was no public participation in the making of this decision.

An elementary way of influencing local legislation by the public is the institution of the local referendum. This instrument is frequently used by local environmental interest groups and NGOs trying to influence local legislation and most commonly to halt certain investments by obliging the municipal council to reconsider its support for environmentally unfavorable projects. Questions, however, must be formulated asking whether the public wants the municipal council to enact a certain piece of local legislation or to make a municipal resolution conforming to the public will. This feature will shortly discuss the public mistrust in such institutions.

Municipal council management of municipal property

Such decisions of the municipal councils predominantly take the form of municipal resolutions; therefore, the public has little if any influence and participation in the making thereof. Only the general rules regarding public participation in municipal decision-making, stemming

from the Local Government Act, prevail here, i.e., documents and sessions of the municipal council are open to the public.

Certainly, the management of municipal assets by the municipal council must comply with national as well as local rules of property management. However, these allow no decisive influence by the public in making decisions. On top of all that, when strategic decisions are at stake, such as the selling of large greenfield areas to potential industrial or commercial investors, the already only slightly open doors of disclosure and participation are shut even further.

Mayor management of municipal property

This case is a subset of the one detailed previously. There is one difference compared to the previous situation: there is even less public participation in such decisions of the mayor, given that s/he is not a collective body whose “session” is normally open to the public.

Case 2

In the town of Veszprém, a practice has developed with regard to the cutting down of trees standing on municipal property. Once a request is submitted for the tree removal, the initial decision is made by the mayor of the town or by the municipal Environmental Committee preceding the decision of the competent clerk. This stems from a local regulation of the operation of the municipal council; however, the national law on tree cutting delegates the power only to the clerk without mentioning the mayor or any municipal committee.

Individual administrative decision-making by the mayor

Mayors have quite limited competence in this regard; therefore, this question is somewhat irrelevant for our research. However, there is one emergency situation when the mayor has decisive power that is most similar to the power of administrative decision-making: smog. In the case of smog, a mayor is entitled to proclaim a smog alert and issue regulations regarding use of certain fuels and limitations on road traffic.

Case 3

It is already commonplace that the threshold for a smog alert of particle matters is exceeded throughout the year in Budapest. Regardless, no smog alert has ever been proclaimed. The Mayor's Office of Budapest says that this is to avoid panic and ensure the smooth flow of road traffic. NGOs, most prominently the Clean Air Action Group, started a campaign to give real meaning to the local smog law by demanding its meaningful enforcement, and to amend that very law to make it easier to proclaim a smog alert, contrary to the present prevailing scheme.

Individual administrative decision-making by clerks

Finally, we have arrived at a process that is dominating the area of administrative decision-making: when clerks decide upon individual administrative matters of citizens and organizations.

Clerks, by the way, are the Janus-faced actors of this play, the double agents of administration: while they have had the unified work organ of municipalities called the Mayor's Office (literal translation), in administrative matters they are not accountable to either the mayor or the municipal council. On the contrary, they are accountable to the central government that operates the so-called Regional Administrative Offices (one in each of the seven regions in Hungary) as superior authorities of clerks in the aforementioned cases.

There are two laws that regulate this decision-making process: the Administrative Procedure Act of 2004 and the Environmental Protection Act of 1995.

According to the Administrative Procedure Act, public participation can take the form of input by individuals or nongovernmental organizations. Individuals usually have legal standing in administrative proceedings (even if they are not the applicants or the complainants) when their rights or legitimate interests, such as property or personal rights, are affected. We would not call this kind of participation true public participation, unlike situations in which NGOs representing the public interest can exercise full legal standing as defined by other statutory instruments. The most relevant statutory instrument is the Environmental Protection Act, whose Article 98 is famous in the Hungarian NGO community.

Case 4

In Hungary, the legal standing of NGOs is in a state of flux. This began in the early 1990s when NGOs were granted their status on the basis of the general Administrative Procedure Act by an interpretative statement of the Attorney General. This stated that: if an NGO defined its goals accordingly, then it could participate in administrative procedures affecting a specific matter (e.g., water management, mining, etc.) in question. At the time, this was associated with the remediation activities on Hungarian territory after the Gabčíkovo–Nagyymaros Dam conflict between Hungary and Slovakia. Later, county courts made more restrictive interpretations, requiring the existence of a specific law assigning tasks to NGOs in order for them to have a standing in the aforementioned cases. Then in 1995, a new Environmental Protection Act was adopted that established status for environmental NGOs in environmental cases in its Article 98. Immediately after entering into force, the problem of the definition of the notion "environmental case" emerged and certain courts settled disputes calling only EIA (environmental impact assessment) cases "environmental." However, in 2004, the Supreme Court declared in its Law Unification Decision No. 1 of 2004 that every case is environmental where the Regional Environmental Inspectorate is at least a consulted authority. Shortly after that, the Ministry of Economy and Transport deprived the Inspectorates of their rights to participate in some highway permitting processes. As a response, the Constitutional Court declared that move unconstitutional and restored the full status of NGOs. In a parallel process, the Capitol Court of Budapest declared that the Environmental Protection Act providing status only to membership NGOs is unreasonably limiting, and broadened the status and granted it to foundations as well. Thus, Article 6.1.b of the Aarhus Convention is implemented in Hungary in a way that the required public participation opportunities prevail through the concept of status in every such case where the competent environmental authority is at least consulted (and undoubtedly in every case where such authority makes the substantive decision).

Thus today, NGOs (and the public through them) have many opportunities to participate in individual environmental administrative decision-making procedures.

Conclusions

Starting from a very wide angle and a broad base, we have arrived at a very narrow field and a very detailed description of the current Hungarian situation.

So what is the overall impression? What is the general conclusion from all this?

In our view, participation of the public in municipal decision-making is relatively well-regulated, and the law provides a number of opportunities to the public (either its individual members or its organized representatives, the NGOs) to express their viewpoints and let municipal officials know what the people think.

It is the public's general apathy and dissatisfaction and mistrust of everything in politics that eventually results in a very limited efficiency of these available tools. This is the underlying reason why so many local referenda on environmental matters were rejected due to the insufficient number of people voting (the quorum is 50 percent plus one person of the local constituency):

2003: two out of ten;
 2004: four out of eight;
 2005: four out of six;
 2006: four out of ten;
 2007: two out of four.

Add to this the ineffective way these tools work (such as the general, mandatory, once-a-year public hearing of a municipality where all relevant topics from the state of kindergarten playgrounds to local taxation mingle and merge) and it becomes understandable why the ordinary public turn away from such opportunities. And when a downward spiral starts, it is very hard to turn back the tide and not just flow with it.

Meaningful participation does not only require a favorable legal environment but also an independent and knowledgeable public. Luckily, NGOs are the ones that are independent and knowledgeable enough to meet the challenges and use the available instruments for the public good. It is not something that can be denied any more, that NGOs are the ones that provide a platform for a few who speak for the whole.

Useful Websites 2

Some sources have been taken from the Champions of Participation Online Resource Pack

CINEFOGO

The Network on Civil Society and New Forms of Governance in Europe—the Making of European Citizenship aims at enhancing the understanding of social and democratic processes, citizenship and democratic participation in Europe.

www.cinefogo.org

Involve

Involve aims to improve understanding of what works in participation and supports good practice. Their website keeps you up to date on their latest projects, archives past publications and provides links to other resources. Involve has their own YouTube channel.

www.involve.org.uk/home

LogoLink—Learning initiative on citizen participation and local governance

LogoLink is a global network of practitioners from civil society organizations, research institutions and governments working to deepen democracy through greater citizen participation in local governance. LogoLink encourages learning from field-based innovations and expressions of democracy which contribute to social justice.

www.logolink.org/index.htm

Peopleandparticipation.net

Launched by Involve, the site provides an interactive tool for identifying suitable methods for participation, a method database, case studies and a participation library.

www.peopleandparticipation.net

Public Participation in Infrastructure Investments Experience from New Member States

David Toft

The obligations of the European Union have brought many new responsibilities for new member states. Keen to decentralize this responsibility to the lowest levels of government, central governments have asked their local governments to take the responsibility to adopt environmental protocols into their governance structures. This article looks at how public participation, whether genuine or not, has become a requirement for large investment programs that impact the environment.

Introduction

In the European Union, public participation in the planning of investment programs and specific investment measures is an explicit requirement. This obligation also applies to accession countries and new member states. Public consultation is mandated in the SEA Directive (2001/42) on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programs on the environment (strategic environmental assessment) as well as in the EIA Directive (2001/42/EC), which holds that the public must be given early and effective opportunities to participate in environmental decision-making procedures. In addition, countries that have signed the Aarhus Convention on

Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters of 1998 have committed, among others, to enabling the public to obtain information on the environment and to participate in decisions that affect the environment. The Convention sets out minimum levels of opportunities for participation and the procedures that must be followed. Further, the Convention holds that the public is entitled to express comments and opinions to the competent authority or authorities when all options are still open and the decision on the request for development consent has not been made. Significantly, all of the CEE countries except Slovakia signed the Convention in 1998; in other words, prior to EU accession.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Toft is a partner and senior consultant with SST Consult in Krakow, Poland. He has implemented and supervised a large number of environmental projects and studies in Poland and the region.

From the foregoing, the obligation to include public participation in the planning and implementation of investment programs and individual investments is clear. In addition, when the EU proposed accession assistance to CEE countries, the requirement for public consultation as part of the investment process was explicit. Despite these facts, however, the limited development of civil society in CEE prior to accession coupled with the promise of “easy” money from the European Union meant that this requirement was not taken seriously. One of the consequences of this ambivalence was the over-sizing of investments. Despite this initial negative experience, increasingly better public consultation practices are being applied.

For CEE countries, the prospect of EU accession in the late 1990s provided an unprecedented opportunity to bridge the gap between candidate countries and the older member states with respect to delivery of quality public services. With assistance funds such as ISPA, among others, amends could begin to be made for years of neglect in infrastructure investment, in particular water and sewage, solid waste management, air protection, and transportation. The promise of massive infrastructure investment support, coupled with local government reforms of the 1990s in the CEE, provided a chance to meet citizens’ expectations. While objectives associated with adopting the EU *acquis* have been and continue to be met, the initial influx of EU funds did not bring about an increase in public participation in the planning of infrastructure investments. To illustrate this, the experience of CEE countries such as Poland is instructive, both in terms of worst and best practices.

Public participation and environmental investments

The typical approach to public participation was to provide information on the proposed investment, under the implicit assumption that the public would not oppose an “environmental” investment. It was thus considered a bureaucratic requirement, or a box that must be checked in order to qualify for aid from the EU. Public meetings were, for example, announced on bulletin boards of water and sewage companies (for water and wastewater projects) or solid waste companies under the assumption that no one would come anyway, and if they did they would only create unrealistic expectations. This resulted from both a lack of experience and expertise on how

to conduct public consultation under EU requirements. In addition, however, beneficiaries had no previous experience in working with the public in the planning and implementation of such investments. The approach was focused on the passive provision of information. Public consultation was also practiced at times, but this was in stark contrast to *participation*, which requires the prior involvement of the public in investment planning (“when all options are still open”) instead of consulting the public on decisions that have already been taken.

It was not simply the lack of experience, however, that hampered public participation, but also the massive influx of co-financing that, at least initially, was viewed as “easy” money. In the 1990s, CEE countries implementing decentralization and local government reforms devised home-grown environmental investment financing mechanisms with resources from environmental fees and penalties. In Poland, regional and local funds for environmental protection were established to which local governments and other institutions could apply for grants and preferential loans to finance environmental infrastructure investments. While each fund could establish its own procedures for identifying projects, best practice included preference for projects that included public consultation in the establishment of local investment priorities, provided that they corresponded to general regional and national priorities.

This “bottom-up” approach to establishing investment priorities, while not without shortcomings, demonstrated that local needs could be met through consultation with the local public represented by NGOs. With the prospect of a massive influx of EU funds also came the gradual decline in importance of such funding mechanisms, except to finance national contributions required in EU co-financed programs. At the same time, public participation came to be seen as a requirement to be fulfilled rather than a factor contributing to the proper identification and selection of priority investment projects.

EU funds, such as ISPA and later the Cohesion Fund, promised to improve service quality through massive infrastructure investment to compensate for the years of neglect and failure to make rehabilitation investments. Qualifying for EU co-financing entailed a level of project preparation that heretofore had not been practiced in the CEE. Feasibility studies with cost-benefit analyses were required for infrastructure investments. Environmental Impact Assessments, together with public consultation procedures in line with the EIA Directive (2001/42/EC), were also required. In addition, efforts

were made to match infrastructure improvements with some measure of households' ability to pay for services. Often, these improvements were the only way to meet requirements of EU directives or national legislation.

In CEE, however, the massive amounts of EU money allocated to water and sewage infrastructure created an incentive for utilities and local governments to plan investments that were not tied to the actual needs (demand) or to the projected growth of the area. Studies conducted to justify these large-scale investments to ensure as large a share as possible from EU funding have recently focused on cost effectiveness (attaining a specified objective at the lowest price), contained very superficial social-benefit cost analyses and little or no environmental impact analysis, and treated public participation as an unnecessary, bureaucratic burden. Thus, the tendency has been to over-scale investments, putting upward pressure on tariffs that are often subject to political review outside financial considerations.

The consequences are beginning to be seen in countries like Poland. EU money from structural and regional development funds is increasingly more carefully matched to the actual benefits to be delivered. For example, if a project proposer had stated in an approved application for co-financing that a given investment would provide 1,000 new wastewater connections and only 800 were delivered, the beneficiary would be in danger of losing (or repaying a portion of) grant assistance. Clearly, public participation in the design of such an investment could have reduced the risk.

On the other hand, some good examples of public consultation (though not true *participation*) do exist. The water company in Warsaw conducted a model public consultation process that was organized *before* the investment "Water supply and wastewater treatment in Warsaw" was implemented. The controversial element of this investment was the construction of an incinerator for sludge from a wastewater treatment plant (WWTP). The company operated under the assumption that a fundamental problem in implementing large infrastructure investments is not in technical analysis, but in obtaining the broadest possible acceptance of stakeholder groups for the investor's efforts.

To this end, the company implemented the following main phases of public consultation:

- **Broad campaign to inform various groups** on the commencement of consultation and investments: Direct contact was made with local government authorities and nongovernmental associations. Indirect contact with residents was made through

the press, as the water company increased the number of printings of an edition of a local newspaper and explained the investment as a whole.

- **Consultations:** This included information activities, i.e., exhibitions, press conferences, information points, brochures, public meetings with residents and NGOs, contests for children, and taking suggestions through a hotline and e-mail.
- **Evaluation of consultation and its results:** The water company then based its further project and information activities on these results.

The company benefited from having taken public consultation seriously. By giving good information on the proposed technology, the company managed to convince some potential opponents. The water company organized, among other things, a trip to the sludge incinerator in Berlin that uses the technology that was proposed for Warsaw. One perennial opponent (from an environmental NGO) that had successfully opposed several other attempts in Poland to build a sludge incinerator had this to say:

For the first time in my work, I had a situation in which I found out about an investment with an environmental impact from the investor itself and not from a group of concerned citizens. This was a new experience for me. In my opinion the consultations were conducted according to all relevant standards.

Even this example does not qualify as true public participation, given that civil society was not involved in the planning of the investment. Instead, the investor made an active effort to convince concerned parties that the selected approach was the best.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is only after years of experience with local government reforms and the active involvement of civil society in the planning of investments prior to implementation that public consultation has become a fairly normal practice. The massive influx of EU funds, while tied to public participation requirements, actually initially provided an incentive to over-size investments with little regard to the actual needs of citizens. The implication for policy is that it is insufficient to mandate public participation; this process must be facilitated and guided.

INTERVIEWS

How to gain access to local decision-making and expand the space for public participation?

Slovakia

Via Iuris – Center for Public Advocacy is a public interest law initiative program in Slovakia that provides legal services to citizens and provides access to justice assistance for citizens filing cases on the behalf of the public interest. Pavol Zilincik from the center in Banska Bystrica answered our questions.

www.viaiuris.sk

- [Can you briefly describe your monitoring and advocacy work?](#)

Slovakia's experience with an authoritarian regime showed that it was a "unique" system where no feedback mechanisms existed. Our past also proved that the closure of any system to feedback is a prerequisite for its decay. This decay affected all of society, particularly the institutional and legal structures of the state.

Since the post-communist change, the government has received continuous feedback through elections. Similarly important is the feedback provided in between elections, by citizens' active participation and by challenging the government's authority and its accountable officials by filing cases against them in court. **Litigation** is the citizens' best tool to call governmental authorities to accountability in the case of their wrongdoing, misuse of power, or law breaking. From 15 years of "litigation history" at Via Iuris, we can say that these cases not only solve specific problems, but to a large extent educate the power holders, increase the standards for the protection of citizens' rights, and create better conditions for the evolution of society and its institutions.

The state profits from this process as well. It is not an accident that the government, parliament, and the courts are institutions that are last in a recent poll of trustworthiness among 18 institutions (74 percent of people do not trust government, 74 percent do not trust parliament, and 68 percent do not trust the courts¹). After some years of mutual learning, the authorities and courts will behave differently and deserve more confidence from the people.

¹ Slovak Statistical office data, <http://www.statistics.sk/webdata/slov/infor/uvvm/uvvm0405b.htm>.

Via Iuris–Center for Public Advocacy promotes broad public involvement in decision-making and public access to justice. Our activities focus on:

- public control of power and elimination of corruption;
- access to information, public participation, and access to justice;
- freedom of expression;
- accountability of the judiciary and promoting ethics in legal professions.

We provide legal assistance in cases that have the potential to bring about a broader change. We share our know-how in workshops and interactive meetings of people affected by similar problems, as well as publishing manuals and web resources. Access to justice drives our focus on barriers preventing people from effective legal remedies, and identifying the appropriate solutions in our legal system.

- [Can you tell us if and how you mobilized citizens in the course of your advocacy activities?](#)

Via Iuris provides legal services for citizens who are already active in decision-making and participation. We also are aware that the law often is not robust enough to adequately protect the public interest, so public support is vital to achieve a positive solution or decision. Therefore, we provide support to citizens concerned about specific decisions and who frequently are exposed to ignorance, violations of the law, and the disregard of their participation rights in their search for answers. In such cases, the citizens themselves organize and advocate for change. Our role is to find the suitable

legal framework for their activity (petition, association), identify and implement the most effective legal strategy, and work on their cases to achieve positive changes in the system.

In some cases, like the case of industrial pollution in Ruzomberok, we helped citizens:

- create and build a citizens' association, and hold their meetings;
- file court cases against eight unlawful permits enabling further pollution;
- check their press materials to prevent defamation claims;
- negotiate with the factory at a series of expert meetings;
- set up the framework and later write an out-of-court settlement contract;
- advise on the implementation of the contract and enforcement of the obligations of the factory

In the outstanding case of a landfill in Pezinok, the public's mobilization resulted in a dramatic change in the policy of a entire chain of authorities. From the beginning of this scandal, the Pezinok authorities failed in all respects in their decision-making, escalating their mistakes gradually:

- A land-use permit was issued for a landfill just 400 meters from the city center, in contradiction to local land-use plan, and regardless of the fact that Pezinok was already the site of another dangerous dump.
- The director of the permitting authority making the decision on the hazardous waste landfill was also the property owner of the land to be the site. He also was a member of the board of the company proposing the construction. His father was the company chief and also a prominent member and sponsor of the leading political party.
- Authorities declared the land-use permit a trade secret, so neither the public nor even the municipality were allowed to inspect it.
- Following legal actions and a public awareness campaign, 1,200 people registered to be party to the procedure (which made it the largest permitting process in Slovakia).
- The time limit for public comments and other procedural rules was simply ignored by the authorities and the construction permit was issued, together with a decision that any possible appeal would not

suspend the construction. (The proponent already had invested enormous resources into the landfill project, and further delay would result in extreme financial losses or even bankruptcy.)

- After this, about 6,000 people assembled to protest at a meeting in Pezinok. The media covered the issue and during two months more than 300 news reports and articles appeared. The case was discussed three times in a parliamentary committee and twice in the Czech cabinet.
- Because of the political background of the proponent and decision-maker, the prime minister was forced to react. First, he questioned the authenticity of the protest and claimed that the protests were blackmail. This was followed by an even stronger response from the public and media. The prime minister apologized and some steps were taken to correct the most flagrant violations of the law.

The result is pending, but citizens have a real chance to win their case. It was crucial that they used every possible legal tool to challenge the authorities' wrongdoing. Informed citizens, helped by legal aid, exploited all the opportunities in a qualified manner and, consequently, forced the government (determined to push its will even illegally) to use practices repugnant to the larger public. As a result, the politicians on top of the political ladder were forced to change their attitudes.

- [From your experience, what is needed to mobilize citizens to participate on issues of public interest and to oppose actions by local institutions that threaten the common good?](#)

The legal environment must be set to enable public access to all relevant information about a plan or project. The citizens shall have a right to participate in the proceedings as “**party to the proceedings**,” with all relevant rights, including the right to appeal and ask for judicial review of the decision. Access to justice must be ensured, in case this public participation faces an unlawful response from the authorities.

Unfortunately, in a case when large financial interests are at stake, usually combined with devastating environmental and health consequences, often the law is not sturdy enough to offer a balanced solution and adequate protection of the public interest. Therefore,

concerned citizens (usually a small group of them) need capacity, energy, courage, and some resources to inform others about the proposed plan and its consequences. Media play a critical role in the mobilization of the public, both local as well as national.

Importantly, active citizens may face possible intimidatory actions, sometimes in the form of a defamation or SLAPP suit (SLAPP—Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) and sometimes even physical attacks. These people require protection and support, and others also need to realize that participation should not be a dangerous, risky activity.

- Do you see any change toward more participatory mechanisms (for citizens and NGOs alike) in the way public authorities are making decisions as a result of your campaigns or similar ones?

The turbulent transition period heavily influences the answer.

On the one hand, we have very good examples of municipalities introducing innovative techniques into

their procedures to involve citizens in their decision-making (Sala, Kremnica, and Martin). These municipalities operate on the principles of open administration and created the conditions for public involvement.

On the other hand, effective participation causes troubles for decision-makers who are unnerved by the participatory environment. A government plan for highway construction is a good example. The government adopted a decision to complete the national highways in Slovakia by 2010. To fulfill this super-ambitious plan, the participatory rights of NGOs has been curtailed dramatically in our laws, some even breaking our international obligations.

Participation is a learning process for the whole of society. The pressure for better governance is growing, and the standards according to which we measure quality of governance are increasing as well. Greater numbers of people understand the principles of good governance and their importance for proper functioning of society than ever before. Therefore, I am sure that in few years, such excesses as the government's restriction of participation in highway construction will face strong public opposition and will be impossible.

Czech Republic

Environmental Law Services is a Czech NGO with 15 full-time lawyers serving the public interest. ELS has been highly influential on both environmental and consumer rights in the Czech Republic, successfully taking on major corporate interests such as Hyundai and Lidl. Pavel Franc answers on behalf of the public interest law organization.

www.eps.cz/en/php/index-en.php

- Can you briefly describe your monitoring and advocacy work?

The Environmental Law Service (ELS) is a public interest law organization. The essence of our work is to provide free legal help to defend the rights of citizens in relationship to the environment. With 15 full-time lawyers, ELS is probably the largest public interest law group in the whole of Europe. We take on a wide variety of monitoring and advocacy work by:

- providing free legal counseling for individuals and communities in public interest cases, with an accent on protection of the environment, access to justice, and public participation;
- carrying out strategic litigation in main legal programs. The programs promote systematic changes—corporate accountability, access to justice, right to clean environment, climate change;
- monitoring new legislation, lobbying and promoting systematic legislative changes, opposing any legislative attacks to restrict public participation and access to justice;
- promoting progressive legal concepts connected with open democracy within the community of legal experts.

- Can you tell us if and how you mobilized citizens in the course of your advocacy activities, and if yes, can you describe how you did it?

We do a lot of work to mobilize people in our strategic cases. We have good reasons to do so. The first one is simple: without a plaintiff, we cannot litigate. For example, we have a case where whole communities are negatively affected by the operation of one huge corporation. But, somebody needs to take the company to court. Of course, we do all the legal work; moreover, we promise to cover court expenses. Nevertheless, it is often complicated to find somebody who will publicly and officially stand up for his or her rights. Also, if we step into a case, we need to have the support of the local community. It's too easy to be misunderstood and labeled an outsider. Therefore, we meet the key persons within the communities and we closely cooperate with them and help them to get more people on their side. We do a lot of media work too, and if needed we help with local campaigns supporting the case. We also organize seminars for the public to train them about their rights.

- From your experience, what is needed to mobilize citizens to participate on issues of public interest and to oppose actions by local institutions that threaten the common good?

From a practical point of view, we need a few individuals from the local community who have the potential to do something in the public interest: that is the first important condition for mobilization. The second most important condition is unfortunately a very “worldly” one: money. In addition to lots of effort and time,

money is important for everything: to pay for leaflets, to rent a room for a meeting, to pay experts, etc. The third element is how to spread the information about an issue and how to persuade the public to act. It's a fragile relationship and depends on many circumstances. In general, information for the public has to be simplified; it also has to be very correct and truthful. Also the “package of the information” should look attractive and be innovative, if possible. A personal approach is also very important. People need to see each other even in the era of the Internet.

- Do you see any change toward more participatory mechanisms (for citizens and NGOs alike) in the way public authorities are making decisions as a result of your campaigns or similar ones?

Our experience brings a clear but disappointing answer to this question. Public institutions continuously restrict public participation and they also do so even as the process is opened to the public. For example, in 1999, we managed to push our bill on public participation in the GMO permit procedure through the legislative procedure. For a few years the process was really open and thanks to it, the Czech office of Greenpeace participated, raised objections, etc. A reaction ensued—public participation was struck off by an amendment to the GMO Act. This is not an exception, but a rule. In the early 1990s idealism was strong after the upheaval of the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic. A new progressive and very liberal law was issued. Public participation in most environmental decision-making was established. Since that time almost every year the political establishment tries to restrict this law and we do our best to protect what already exists.

Romania

Alburnus Maior is a local community group in the Apuseni mountains of Romania. For over five years, it has opposed the Rosia Montana mining project that, if approved, would create the largest open-pit gold mine in Europe. Stephanie Roth and Stephania Simon are members of Alburnus Maior.

www.rosiamontana.ro

- [Can you briefly describe your monitoring and advocacy work?](#)

Alburnus Maior monitors the entire decision-making process with regards to the Rosia Montana gold mine proposed by the Canadian mining company Gabriel Resources. It wants to make sure that the process complies fully with national and international legislation and respects the human rights of the affected local population. At the same time, Alburnus Maior advocates for more environmentally sound and sustainable development alternatives for Rosia Montana. Alburnus Maior documents and challenges all forms of corruption, seeking to ensure not only the rule of law but also the best possible decisions. If procedural irregularities or human rights abuses are discovered, we launch either court actions and/or petitions, usually with the participation of environmental NGOs. Alburnus Maior communicates these efforts to the national and international press and publishes its material on its websites. Alburnus Maior also monitors international financial institutions that we seek to influence in collaboration with specialized NGOs such as BankTrack and CEE Bankwatch.

- [Can you tell us if and how you mobilized citizens in the course of your advocacy activities?](#)

By definition Alburnus Maior is a citizen group and as such our aim is to inform the public and promote broad citizen participation in decision-making. Alburnus Maior commissions studies and online opinion polls, organizes letter writing actions and demonstrations, and builds strategic alliances by bringing together artists, lawyers, scientists, students, and others. During the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure for the Rosia Montana proposal (December 2004–September 2007), Alburnus Maior commissioned expert studies on relevant issues and made the findings available to local groups participating in the public consultation.

Following action alerts by Alburnus Maior, over 21,000 citizens from Romania and abroad submitted detailed comments to Romania's Ministry of the Environment, requesting it not to issue the environmental permit for the proposed mine due to legal, social, environmental, cultural, and economic concerns.

- [From your experience, what is needed to mobilize citizens to participate on issues of public interest and to oppose actions by local institutions that threaten the common good?](#)

Access to information, including information on the procedural rights of the public to be allowed to participate, is the key to mobilizing the public. Access to information must have objective and politically independent support from public institutions. The information needs to be released to the public at as early a stage as possible, and it has to be concrete so that the public can relate to and conceptualize it. How the public can effectively participate should be made as easy and clear as possible.

As long as local and national public institutions remain controlled and driven by the political interest of the political party in power, then public participation will always be “political” rather than truly “public.” The NGO community, on the other hand, can and should play a vital role in developing the skills of citizens who feel that participation is both a duty and virtue. This is particularly important in order to eliminate the circumstances or traditions that feed or increase the “silent majority” and render public participation “political.”

- Do you see any change toward more participatory mechanisms (for citizens and NGOs alike) in the way public authorities are making decisions as a result of your campaigns or similar ones?

We are not seeing any positive changes. In general, public authorities are quick to learn from their mistakes in battles won by public interest groups. What they learn is to their advantage, making them more sophisticated enemies. If there is an “improvement,” then this improvement is purely formalistic but on the merits of the cases they will always insist on their political agenda.

The aim of a public institution is to push for its agenda. Another reaction to a victory by public interest groups is to pass counter-laws that aim to control, diminish, hinder, or complicate participation and to return to decision-making to small political circles. As a direct response to the public consultation process in the Rosia Montana EIA case, which revealed

many procedural irregularities, Romania’s Ministry for the Environment wanted to pass a law that protects EIA studies under intellectual property regulations, making vital information inaccessible to the public. As a consequence of the licensing procedure for Rosia Montana EIA, Romania’s Agency for Mineral Resources (ANMR) now wishes to change the country’s mining law by transferring the role of the granter of a mining license from the government to one single person, the president of ANMR, the agency that is the financial beneficiary of the granting of a mining license. The reason for this shift is that no government leader wants to be associated with granting a mining license for a project as controversial as Rosia Montana. It is extremely rare to see a local public institution consulting with citizens in a way that is not connected to a local political party or personal advantage. In this sense local public institutions have indeed learned how to do this in a more “meaningful” way.

Albania

MJAFT! started as a highly successful grass-roots movement to mobilize the Albanian public on hot-button issues. Erion Valiaj, founder and former director of the movement, answers our questions.

www.mjaft.org

- Can you briefly describe your monitoring and advocacy work?

The MJAFT! Movement was initiated in 2004 by myself and three of my closest friends as a reflection of our unease with the lack of open and frank public debate on political, economic, and social problems that characterized the transitional years of Albania, which ranked poorly in most indices (even compared to other South Eastern European countries), including those that measure gender quality, corruption, access to education, and health services. Initially, MJAFT! (ENOUGH!) was a slogan and colloquial response, and at its center was a four-month public campaign reaching out to over three million Albanians in the country and abroad. MJAFT! soon went on to become the largest and most successful awareness-raising and advocacy campaign ever held in Albania. Following its conclusion, we recognized the acute need for the continuation of MJAFT!’s work by

establishing a broad movement that presses for civic activism, national development, and the improvement of Albania’s image abroad.

The assumption for our engagement was that Albania’s social ills could no longer be blamed on the remains of the communist regime. Rather, our problems were accompanied by a non-participatory and consequently frail democracy characterized by authoritarian, irresponsible, conflictual, and poor politics. We believed that a good democracy, proper governance, and prosperous society could be built only if constructive civic demand and participation could be achieved. Thus, we made it our mission to increase active citizenship, strengthen the sense of community, promote responsible governance, and improve the image of Albania in the world through: (1) encouraging participation of citizens in decision-making by influencing and monitoring policies at both the local and national level; (2) promoting volunteerism

and improving cooperation within communities; and (3) rehabilitating the sense of protest. Consequently, our movement was comprehensive, encompassing a diversified program that places civil society and all of its components at the epicenter of its work. The vision of the MJAFT! movement was, and still is even after my resignation, to achieve a well-governed Albania with active citizens, strong communities, and a positive image in the world.

- Can you tell us if and how you mobilized citizens in the course of your advocacy activities?

MJAFT! has become Albania's largest movement with over 10,000 members, more than 1,000 volunteers, and branches in over 16 cities countrywide that both serve as government "watchdogs" and lobbyists. The movement has worked hard to empower communities and has stimulated public demand for the improvement of basic living conditions. The dissemination of information has been the most powerful tool to mobilize citizens. Information provides citizens with access to shape policies that will affect their lives and participate in local decision-making. A lack of information makes citizens apathetic, indifferent, and unable to influence not only processes that do not maximize their interests, but also those that infringe upon their rights and freedoms. We have worked to persuade young people to participate in the political process so that they can take responsibility for what is happening in their society. Three overarching methodologies have been used to this aim: public information and education, advertising, and group learning.

We have utilized different methods and messages to target different demographic segments of the population. It also must be taken into consideration that some groups learn differently than others. Two acceptable practices are conventional education (slow) or public campaigns (quick, alternative education). Our experience with advertising shows that high-impact media campaigns attract and hold the attention of a large segment of the population. Our message reaches even remote villages, towns, and the outskirts of the capital, Tirana. Due to a widespread sense of civic apathy, small- and medium-sized towns also suffer from a severe lack of social and cultural activities. Hence, outreach tours and mobile theaters have been very successful during previous campaigns, attracting large audiences and

exposing them to MJAFT!'s campaign messages. Our "Rock the Vote" Music/Theater Tour during election campaigns has been a formidable platform to launch voter-awareness messages.

- From your experience, what is needed to mobilize citizens to participate on issues of public interest and to oppose actions by local institutions that threaten the common good?

The first and most important thing is to bring the issue to the public's attention. Judging from our experience, it is effective to identify a few public figures (experts and analysts) who possess the expertise as well as enjoy the community's trust, who argue the pros and cons of the issue and the repercussions for the interest groups involved. Mobilization occurs only if the citizens are informed of their vested interests and the responsibilities of their local public institutions. This information is more credible when delivered by citizens who enjoy the community's respect and trust.

- Do you see any change toward more participatory mechanisms (for citizens and NGOs alike) in the way public authorities are making decisions as a result of your campaigns or similar ones?

The local public institutions do provide access for citizens, citizens groups, and NGOs as long as their influence and the pressure they exert remains peripheral. We have measured some inclination on the part of the public institutions to consult more with citizens and not to engage in the decision-making process with total impunity. Nevertheless, our government does not adhere to its responsibilities which are inextricably linked with fair management, efficiency, budget allocation, development strategies, and so on. The dissociation of our political class from the citizens reduces the efficiency of our political activity as well as enables our democracy to remain superficial.

Warts ‘n’ All

Grass-roots Roma NGOs and Local Governments in Central Europe

Bernard Rorke

Engagement with Roma civil society is an absolute necessity. Most governments think about Roma inclusion in terms of projects and sporadic measures but not in terms of programs or integrated policies. Providing snapshots from around the region, this article advocates for a more holistic intervention if Roma are to be successfully included in the improvement of local political and community life.

Introduction

On Roma issues bad news travels far and wide, and the catalog of grim narratives reminds us that the situation of Europe’s largest ethnic minority remains one of the most acute challenges in terms of social exclusion, discrimination, and deprivation. One danger is the perception of Roma populations as an undifferentiated mass of passive victims and this has taken root in the popular imagination, in the minds of policymakers, and in the minds of well-intentioned but misguided advocates for the Roma cause. The histories of the Roma are inseparable from, but emphatically not reducible to, victimization. The work of local grass-roots Roma-led NGOs does much to counter such stereotypes. More importantly their rich and varied achievements provide an eloquent testament to the capacity for agency that resides within Roma communities.

Thanks to far-reaching and asymmetric decentralization, government’s virtues and deficits can be most acutely felt at the local level. And it is at the local level that the efforts of grass-roots Roma NGOs face the greatest challenges and arguably make the most significant impact on the well-being of Roma communities. Local efforts are often overlooked, their achievements deemed to be somehow mundane or boring. But this perception is misguided because what happens in the municipality and the *mahala* is the very “stuff” of democracy, the most immediate, direct, warts ‘n’ all interactions between the governors and the governed.

This article presents a snapshot of the diversity of Roma NGOs, their wide range of activities, and varied impacts and interactions with local municipalities. Twelve NGOs, grantees of the Roma Participation Program from four different countries, Hungary, Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria, responded to four questions: How

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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have your advocacy campaigns changed the way you can work with local authorities? Have these contacts “kept the door open” for participation in local decision-making? What happened in the course of your advocacy to change the local government’s way of thinking and communicating? Have any campaign successes led to Roma participation in decision-making, or not?

Hungary

In response to the question concerning campaigns and their impact, Laszlo Sztojka, head of the NGO Baxtale Rom in Kiskőrös, replied:

Yes, indeed, we had several campaigns, for example, the project Together Against Breast Cancer, which had a great effect on the population, because approximately 800 women participated in taking a mammography test. Another example is the Kiskőrösi Arany Háromszög (Golden Triangle) Tanoda,¹ realized in the framework of a government program on education. It has proved to be one of the most successful education and development programs in Hungary. There’s also our adult training and employment program, which is widely acknowledged as a success and has attracted much attention.

Emphasizing the necessity of a collaborative approach to effect lasting change, Sztojka recalls how he first made the local authorities pay heed to their Roma constituents. Baxtale Rom contested the local elections. Sztojka won a seat as a local representative, and two other Roma were delegated to the local committee. At the county level Sztojka then succeeded in being selected as a representative to the Assembly of Bács-Kiskun County. They chose this path as they considered the minority self-government² “neither politically nor professionally prepared to advocate successfully for their target group.” The combination of awareness raising and political campaigning led to Roma issues becoming part of the day-to-day agenda, Roma participation in decision-making becoming routine, and as Sztojka put it: “a consensus among the majority and minority that problems affecting Roma can only be solved by common efforts and cooperation.”

As to the lasting impact in changing the local authorities’ way of thinking, Sztojka was emphatic about the transformation. From the outset they warned that

continued policy neglect of Roma issues would have a negative impact on the entire community. Baxtale Rom’s activities led to local decision-makers taking a more considered approach, as Sztojka explained:

These campaigns meant that Roma became part of the everyday life of the town. We got access to many things which would have been impossible before, such as paving the roads in the Roma settlement; building a sewage and water disposal system; and creating health, education, and employment programs.

He added that the work of integration is ongoing and constant because attitudes cannot be changed overnight. Success is visible, he asserts, because “segregation does not exist in our settlement, neither in local government, schools, or nurseries,” and can only be sustained by continued close collaboration and communication between the majority and minority communities.

The experience of RPP’s partner in Jászládány proffers a reminder of the unsavory aspect of local democracy. The NGO’s forthright opposition to blatant segregation in schools and other public institutions and an ensuing nationwide scandal resulted in an enduring antipathy from the mayor, his extended family, and other public figures, so that as Jászásági Polgárjogi Szervezet Director László Kállai explained, “we have not managed to talk about cooperation since then.” The NGO’s activities have led to a more careful attitude on the part of the authorities when it comes to dealing with Roma. A series of public demonstrations combined with the provision of legal advice and representation have led to a marked decrease in discrimination cases. However, Roma continue to be excluded from local decision-making, a state of affairs Kállai attributes to the “hostility and personal detestation of local non-Roma leaders.” Kállai continues to campaign to “change the mayor’s point of view so that he stops dividing and segregating the population, especially pupils in elementary school. We have not succeeded yet.”

Macedonia

National Roma Centrum (NRC), based in Kumanovo, has been supported by RPP since its inception three years ago. A dynamic, campaigning human rights NGO, they described the impact of one recent project, “The key is in our hands,” on equal access to quality education for Roma. This project combined a drive to increase the number of enrolled Roma pupils in elementary education through improved institutional cooperation

1 School for children and teenagers with special needs.

2 Hungary has a parallel system of local minority self-governments with mostly symbolic power.

at all levels with an awareness-raising campaign for the importance of education within the Roma community. Financed by the Roma Education Fund, NRC initiated cooperation with 13 local self-governments. The biggest impact of this campaign was with local self-governments from Kumanovo, Prielp, and Kocani. In all of these municipalities, those responsible for education acted to increase the enrollment and admission of Roma pupils in a number of schools, facilitated close cooperation with mediators working in the project, and resolved issues of school segregation in Kumanovo and Prilep. “In Kumanovo we managed to enroll a significant number of Roma children in the so-called ‘elite’ schools,” said Ashmet Elezovski, director of NRC. “Prior to the campaign, although the schools were legally obliged to admit Romani children, a combination of prejudice and disinterest meant that this did not happen...” “The key is in our hands” initiative has resulted in successful cooperation with 52 schools in 11 cities.

This campaign generated a wide coalition of support, including the government of Macedonia, the president, and the Ministry of Education, essential for its successful implementation. As Ashmet explained:

The support we received on a national level played an important role in opening the doors of the schools. In order to win over the representatives of the local self-governments, schools, and teachers, we organized screenings of a short documentary made by NRC in schools, offices of local self-governments, and Roma settlements. We held press conferences and public debates. NRC’s media lobby group launched a concerted campaign, writing articles and generating radio and television coverage to sensitize the wider public and present a positive image of Roma.

Despite the successes of this campaign, NRC stresses that much more needs to be done. They think that policy interventions are too sporadic, progress is often stalled by wider political instability, and that budget allocations are insufficient compared to the scale of the problems. Ashmet stated that:

The most innovative projects are initiated by the civil sector and funded by foreign donors. Political will needs to go beyond the declarative level, which of itself will not address the real needs of the Roma population. Decade National Action Plans need to be matched by an institutional readiness to take concrete steps towards implementation. Our campaign gave us an opportunity to apply pressure and alert the institutions to pay greater attention to the issue of Roma education and the need for affirmative and effective action.

To move forward, they insist that urgent work is needed to address the needs of Roma citizens quite literally stranded on the edges of towns, unnoticed and unwanted. They stressed the need for direct visits to settlements to initiate open and democratic dialogue to promote trust and active participation:

The Roma population is still on the margins of society, in conditions of alarming poverty. Urgent action and political will is necessary to move beyond empty promises to make the Decade of Roma Inclusion a reality in all spheres of social life.

Established three years ago, NGO LIL works in three Skopje municipalities: Gorce Petrov, Karpos, and Saraj. One of its main priorities is to assist those Roma who are unregistered or lack basic identification papers, and as a consequence have neither the right nor access to basic services. This target group also includes Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians displaced by conflict in Kosovo.

The director of NGO LIL, Sarita Jasarova, explained how they worked with the Health Ministry to develop a campaign to inform local communities about the rights of the uninsured, “for example, how persons without health insurance can benefit from the 15 national programs for preventive and primary healthcare.” LIL also successfully intervened in cases of abuse and discrimination by health professionals, especially with regard to the registration of newborns by mothers also lacking an official ID. Meanwhile LIL sought a more systematic solution and signed a memorandum of cooperation with the mayor of Karpos in September 2007; and by October signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation with the inter-municipal Center for Social Work as part of LIL’s actions in the fields of health care and legal status.

Nadir Redzepi, director of RDDA Sonce in Tetovo, traces the shift in relations between local authorities and the Roma community to two projects implemented by his NGO. The training modules in the first project, Community Dialogue and Capacity Building, were attended by local authorities, representatives from civil society, and the local business sector. The project increased mutual understanding and participants worked to define common grounds for cooperation. The second project was the Local Decade Action Team. Local authorities (both decision-makers and public administration) and Roma representatives developed the local Decade of Roma Inclusion Action Plans. They then jointly conducted an advocacy campaign that resulted in adoption of the action plans by the Tetovo Municipal Council. RDDA Sonce’s programs, projects,

and activities have strengthened relations with the local authorities. There is a regular exchange of information with the local authorities, while RDDA Sonce works together with the municipality in the running of a Roma Information Center, and receives funds from the municipality for its work on the inclusion of Roma children in preschool education.

Nadir explained some of the practical ways RDDA Sonce has become a valuable resource for local authorities:

For example, the Local Employment Center had an opportunity to offer unqualified workers from its list of unemployed to a new employer and it asked our organization if Roma would be interested.... As a result of RDDA Sonce's follow-up, 20 Roma were employed and this number is expected to grow. In another example, the Health Protection Center contacted RDDA Sonce to help identify Roma children who were unvaccinated. This action is still running. The Local Social Center and other institutions contact us for information and cooperation to make the local public services more accessible for the Roma. RDDA Sonce also actively contributes to the local public life. There are many examples of our involvement in consultation and involvement in decision-making.

RDDA Sonce's successes have led to a change in attitudes and policy approaches to Roma. As Nadir put it:

The Local Decade Action Team project marked the first time the Tetovo Municipality introduced action plans (or any type of action) related to Roma in its work. Roma issues are taken more seriously, in that the municipality adopted a specific and targeted policy. Through the involvement of local authorities and public administration in RDDA Sonce's activities, prejudices, and stereotypes towards Roma are being overcome and Roma gained better access to public services. There is still a long way to go, but there are obvious results from the efforts of our organization.

Serbia

Zeljko Jovanovich, senior manager at RPP, worked extensively in Serbia with the OSCE Mission in Belgrade and with grass-roots NGOs before coming to OSI–Budapest. He said that after decentralization reforms in Serbia, the shortcomings in terms of implementation has meant that the most important work done by Roma NGOs is at the local level. In this, “the Decade matters a lot and has become the frame of reference for Roma-

led advocacy and action plans adopted by the central government.” His campaigning work in Valjevo involved public meetings on Roma issues with municipalities, public figures, politicians, and international organizations to draw wider attention and push for the adoption of local policies on Roma. This put Valjevo on the “donor map” that the municipality was willing “to open its doors.” The focus of RPP-led advocacy with local partners has been about making the Decade matter in the municipalities. Zeljko's assessment is that:

The impact varies according to the local political context ... there is an openness for consultation while the decision-making process takes place behind closed doors. This is not determined by political allegiance to the left or right. In some cases, for whatever motives, radicals have been more open than democrats.

Since the launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Zeljko asserts that much has changed in terms of local governments' sensitivity to Roma issues. Structurally, the major innovation is that while policymaking at the national level is framed by the Decade priorities, there is a growing trend for collaboration between Roma and municipalities to draft local action plans. However, he identified certain limitations:

Local government competencies cover housing, while education, employment, and health are under the mandate of local structures of central ministries. Budgetary contributions from the municipality are inadequate for the size of the problems; expertise within local administration is limited; and the capacity of Roma NGOs is often insufficient to provide constructive input.

His assessment is reflected in the experiences of three NGOs that he contacted.

The Roma Center for Democracy (RCD), Valjevo, provided a list of campaign work that has led to systematic cooperation with local authorities since 2003 in the sphere of education. In 2003–2004, the NGO conducted the research project “Roma, Go to School!” Implemented in partnership with the local office of the Ministry for Education, this was a needs assessment and diagnosis of problems faced by Roma in education in the western region of Serbia. The findings and recommendations, and a follow-up, a RCD-led project in 2005—“Education of Roma: Solutions for the Future”—finally resulted in a local action plan being adopted officially by the local assembly in 2006. Since then, the municipality has committed EUR 6,000 annually from its budget. RCD successfully

lobbied for the establishment of a Municipal Council for the Implementation of the Local Action Plan that involves representatives of the Roma community as well as the office of the Roma Community Advocate. RCD secured a grant from the Roma Education Fund to promote the inclusion of Roma parents in the process and policy of school integration, and Roma parents were subsequently appointed to school boards in three local schools.

RCD's assessment of progress to date is as follows:

Until 2003, there was no political will concerning Roma issues. Our activities resulted in a change of attitude by the local government in both political and practical terms. Roma are involved in municipal bodies as well as the decision-making body of schools as appointed by the municipality. Before the local action plan, local government did not work with Roma except in the case of Roma cultural events once a year. Now, there is a local action plan at the policy level, backed by financial contributions. Problems remain in implementation, our role is principally consultative, and final decisions remain in the hands of politicians. Progress and decision-making was slowed down last year by a wider political crisis between the national assembly and executive, which had a direct impact on local government. This affected Roma projects which were designed in partnership with the municipality.

The Roma Media Center (RMC) from Novi Sad, Vojvodina, reported that start-up institutional support funding from RPP helped it to establish a sense of partnership between the Roma community and the local authorities. This was formalized in a memorandum of cooperation with the local government. Meetings organized by the Roma Media Center—attended by representatives of local and provincial government, the Council for Integration of Roma, and Roma NGOs—have resulted in regular contacts and active involvement in the decision-making process. Since signing the memorandum, Roma representatives have been invited to participate in Roma-related activities of the local government and get involved in the local action plans on Roma as well as in the discussions on the budgetary allocations.

The Youth Forum for the Education of Roma (Bujanovac, southern Serbia) similarly reported that local government was open to dialog, and that a change in attitude was immediately apparent: “We think they see us as partners and seek our opinions as a body that assists in practical ways to resolve Roma issues. The building of the new integrated preschool for all the children from Bujanovac was an example of our collaboration. Local publicity emphasized in public several times our positive

role working together with the school.” Concerning Roma participation in the decision-making process, local issues are complicated by the wider political problems between Serbia and Kosovo. With a large Albanian population, the current crisis means that the Roma issue is not a priority. The Forum recognizes that while they are “not a strong enough political player,” nonetheless they “keep showing their readiness to contribute.”

Bulgaria

Anton Karagiozov, Director of the Foundation for Regional Development Roma–Plovdiv (FRD–Plovdiv), described the shift in approach over four years of work for the local Roma community. Initially, FRD–Plovdiv relied solely on the potential and resources within the Roma community to tackle the problems it faced. It soon became evident that without the active involvement of the local authorities and institutions there would be little in the way of sustainable results. With funding and support from the Open Society Foundation—Sofia, FRD–Plovdiv initiated an “intercession” program of trainings, meetings, and community consultations involving Roma community representatives, the mayor, the deputy mayor, and representatives from different departments in the Municipality of Plovdiv. FRD–Plovdiv helped to establish a District Council for Ethnic and Demographic Issues, presided over by the District Governor of Plovdiv. Different commissions were established within the body, covering education, healthcare, human rights, and employment, and it was comprised both of experts and competent Roma representatives. The outcome of this project was to establish and institutionalize a model of cooperation between the local government and Roma civil society partners.

This partnership was further consolidated in a joint project³ addressing youth, education, and social well-being. Twenty-one young Roma, aged 16–30, successfully completed training covering civil rights and responsibilities, discrimination, advocacy, and negotiation skills. The course was delivered by specialists from the Association for European Integration and Human Rights and the Open Society Foundation—Sofia. The educational aspect of the program aimed to stimulate parental involvement and to build partnerships with school boards, management, and teachers. Together with the Regional Inspectorate of Education in Plovdiv,

3 Project “Intercession for Local Changes,” financed by PHARE program BG0204.02 “Civil Society Development” Program.

a program was developed to promote educational integration. Addressing social issues, a series of focus group discussions and public meetings resulted in a framework for minority inclusion being adopted by the Municipal Council of Plovdiv.

This proactive “intercession” model paved the way for the success of FRD–Plovdiv’s school desegregation initiative. Currently, 220 Roma children are attending integrated schools in a program first supported by the Roma Participation Program and later by the Roma Education Fund. Anton Karagiozov said:

Beyond question more needs to be done with regards to communication with local and state authorities. However, our intercession campaigns, the meetings, and the public dialog over the last three to four years have had a definite and positive impact on the development of democratic processes in the town.

The new Sofia-based Regional Policy Development Center (RPDC), together with local Roma organizations and activists, ran a series of awareness-raising campaigns targeting local administration in the municipalities of Pazardzik, Berkovitsa, and Stara Zagora about the local-level implementation of school desegregation. These meetings involved school governors, mayors, Regional Inspectorates of Education (RIE), key political actors, school principals, and local Roma activists in each of the municipalities.

The first outcome was the elaboration of Municipal Strategies to Improve Roma Education. As director Toni Tashev puts it, “The next step—how to make these strategies work—was even more difficult.” So far two of the municipalities, Pazardzik and Berkovitsa, have made financial commitments towards desegregation. In Stara Zagora, the mayor adopted the municipal strategy, then refused to implement it. The local elections in October 2007 led to a new mayor being elected there. In response to a renewed advocacy campaign, the mayor proposed that the local coordinator of the desegregation campaign take the position of Municipal Expert on Ethnic Integration. In Vidin the local elections also opened new possibilities. The Regional Policy Development Center and several local Roma leaders initiated a series of meetings with the newly elected mayor of Vidin. As a first result, an agreement was reached to increase the number of Roma within the municipal administration. Another positive outcome was a joint effort with the municipality to target EU funds to Roma issues in the municipality—the RPDC assisted the municipality in preparing several EU projects directed at improving the living conditions of Roma. RPDC’s

next objective is to convince the municipality to commit resources to support the process of desegregation of Roma education in Vidin, led by the Roma NGO Drom and supported up to now solely by RPP and REF.

Another interesting initiative from Bulgaria is an internship program for Roma students in local institutions and administration run by the Student Society for the Development of Interethnic Dialogue (SSDID). Recently launched, there are 12 interns placed in nine cities across Bulgaria. As Tano Bechev, SSDID director, put it: “On the one hand, this scheme offers much in terms of career development of the students. On the other hand, our organization has established important contacts and very strong basis for future cooperation with the local authorities and institutions around the country.”

Conclusion

Despite the diversity of NGO activities, the different challenges facing Roma communities, and the very varied political contexts, some common themes have emerged. The experiences and concerns of local Roma NGOs resonate with the findings of the Decade Watch Report Decade Watch, which conducted the first assessments of government actions to implement the commitments made under the Decade of Roma Inclusion, noted that most governments think about Roma inclusion in terms of projects and sporadic measures but not in terms of programs or integrated policies and asserted that “it is essential that the Decade be embedded in what local governments and local branches of line ministries do.... National governments need to involve municipalities in the Decade.” The report warns that, “Unless there is recognition of the special role and responsibility of municipalities in delivering the outcomes under the Decade, the process will fail.” The dynamism and creativity of Roma NGOs and the evident capacities for sustainable intervention and collaboration with local institutions and authorities provide a graphic challenge to the warped but widespread perception of Roma as the “problem.” Engagement with Roma civil society is part of the solution to strengthen local democracy and promote integration and social cohesion. One of the most pertinent lessons learned (and this learning process continues) within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion is that engagement with Roma civil society can no longer be seen as merely an option but must be recognized by central and local governments as a necessity.

INTERVIEWS

How to gain access to local decision-making and expand the space for public participation?

Macedonia

Sonce Makedonija is a Macedonian NGO that monitors the implementation policies on Roma, EU integration processes with a focus on minority participation, and government decentralization with a focus on interethnic relations and minority participation. Nadir Redzepi spoke with us about the NGO's experiences advocating for and with the Roma.

www.sonce.org.mk

- Can you tell us if and how you mobilized citizens in the course of your advocacy activities?

In various programs we make efforts to systematically monitor and advocate for Roma, primarily focused on increasing the awareness of decision-makers at different government levels. The monitoring process is done by teams at each level with a specific methodology and focus. The advocacy approach is combination of multilateral and bilateral meetings, using the media for informing the wider public.

At the end of 2005, we initiated the drafting of a local action plan for Roma in Tetovo. We organized a meeting for all the local stakeholders (Roma leaders, local government authorities, journalists, national institutions) with the aim of motivating them for full participation in city planning. A local team of 14 people was delegated and consisted of Roma and non-Roma representatives, with the task to draft and propose to the local council of Tetovo an action plan for Roma integration. The document was finalized in five months and officially adopted at a council meeting in May 2006. Local authorities can be committed to citizen initiatives if they are involved from the very first phase, but also if they can see the benefit to the majority population. We mobilized several Roma leaders to share their problems publicly as a problem that concerned the whole town and connected it with the ongoing international initiatives on Roma issues.

- From your experience, what is needed to mobilize citizens to participate on issues of public interest and to oppose actions by local institutions that threaten the common good?

The most obvious need is to make citizens aware that the issue in question concerns their families and lives. In this regard, we, as an organization, should give as many concrete examples and assumptions about how things can develop to our clients/constituents. Sometimes this needs additional efforts within the community groups in order to identify the most influential people, but also to use a common language that is understandable for ordinary citizens. If the problems do not concern all citizens, then there will always be a group who is ignorant and does not care about the burning issue. In such a case, we use convincing public campaigns and initiate debates, recalling human and ethical values for dignity and rights in society.

- Do you see any change toward more participatory mechanisms (for citizens and NGOs alike) in the way public authorities are making decisions as a result of your campaigns or similar ones?

Access to local public institutions is quite slow and still not as visible or effective as expected. Resistance to change the behavior of public administration is an issue that our society has not been able to solve in the 15 years since the post-communist transition. Incompetence and a lack of skills are also major flaws in public administration. In addition, bias against the

NGO sector is often prevalent. We often listen to the term NGO in the vocabulary of state administrators, but this is just *pro forma*, used in public speeches. NGO representatives only are invited to consultations in cases where the initiative is internationally supported or when the institutional knowledge on the issue is zero. The decision-making process is still opaque to citizens and NGOs who argue that institutions and delegated authorities have a responsibility to their mandates. Meanwhile, NGOs are considered as informal groups. Some participation of different groups or NGOs in some decision-making processes has occurred, but in most cases this is controlled by the authorities who see this as an alibi for international funders and the media. It is not manipulation but rather a dictate from local or national authorities, who are aware of the power NGOs possess or are given within the mandate. A combination of political, financial, and institutional interest is present at all stages of plans and decisions, where it is hard to identify the ordinary citizens' interest. In the best (or worst) case, some institutions that are recognized as open and transparent in their work behave in a different manner with citizens belonging to small minority groups. This is hard to prove and measure, mostly because citizens do not want or are unaware that their rights are denied by the institutions.

- Do you see the space for consultation with citizens expanding for other groups and social interests in addition to the ones you've been working on?

After multiethnic conflict in Macedonia in the early part of this decade, the Ohrid Agreement produced constitutional changes for all citizens, but for now only the Albanian minority benefits from it. Macedonia has adopted targeted policies for Roma in an open consultation process with Roma structures, but the whole process has remained without any proper mechanism at the local level. Roma voices are not utterly silent when reminding government of its constitutional responsibilities, but this does not effect the institutional behavior. At the local level the human rights of Roma are broken mostly in the areas of employment and housing, while education is a field where slight improvements have been made, mainly with the support of international projects. In general, all Macedonian governments until now have addressed Roma through social measures/policies and mostly rely on international funds.

Montenegro

MANS is the Network for the Affirmation of the Nongovernmental Sector in Montenegro. Its work covers a broad area of activities and advocacy essential to the inclusive participation of NGOs and the public. Dejan Milovac answers on the behalf of its Executive Director, Vanja Calovic.

www.mans.cg.yu

- Can you tell us if and how you mobilized citizens in the course of your advocacy activities, and if yes, can you describe how you did it?

MANS' work is currently conducted through four main program areas: Corruption and Conflict of Interest, Spatial Planning and Construction Industry, Free Access to Information and Legal Aid, and Parliamentarian. Some of the key outcomes and successes so far include:

- MANS has increased the capacities of citizens and their formal and informal groups to more

independently advocate for their rights and more easily recognize and report corruption.

- Following a public petition on subsidies in electricity prices provided to large industrial consumers, signed by almost 30,000 citizens, representing the largest public support obtained for civic initiative so far, the government has developed a social program for vulnerable groups, while the regulatory agency removed the fluctuating electricity rates for households and small- and medium-size enterprises.

- The mobilization of citizens and NGOs in public hearings on the National Spatial Plan resulted in a decreased number of envisaged large hydroelectric plants in the Draft Energy Strategy. Judicial practice was created in the area of the right to free access to information through over 250 decisions of the Administrative Court and 25 of the Supreme Court, with over 50 percent of decisions in MANS' favor.
- From your experience, what is needed to mobilize citizens to participate on issues of public interest and to oppose actions by local institutions that threaten the common good?

Burdened by remnants of the Yugoslav communist system, Montenegrin society lacks an adequate participatory culture in both designing and monitoring implementation of key social policies. But in cases where public interest is clear, citizens are ready to participate in demands for change in areas that directly concern them. Proof of that is a petition for the preservation of River Tara, and a petition on electricity bills that MANS organized, collecting the support of over 30,000 citizens.

The key issue to be addressed when mobilizing citizens lies in the successful interpretation of the outcomes and consequences that the relevant government decision/policy will have on public interest. Often key issues that could significantly harm public interest are wrapped up in forms that are not always clear to the general public from different educational backgrounds. However, only a few NGOs in Montenegro have the adequate capacities, knowledge, and determination to continuously monitor the performance of government authorities. Only a small number of advocacy campaigns on the national level managed to mobilize the wider public.

- How is access to local public institutions and their decision-making processes sustained once a campaign achieves some access for citizens/citizen groups/NGOs acting on behalf of some social interests, be it at the policy or project level?

Local public institutions change their manner of operations on a case-by-case basis rather than regulating

that area in accordance with the law and demands deriving from a public campaign. For example, in 2004 MANS led the local campaign in Podgorica against the decision by the local authority to pull down illegally developed objects like kiosks and housing without any criteria or plan. We asked for rules to be established at the national level for constitutional equality among citizens in Montenegrin municipalities.

After a month-long media campaign, the local authorities gave up, while a ministry started drafting a national law on illegal development. However, the local authorities still reject the call to set up a clear plan to solve this issue. But due to the interest of the public and media, they are far more careful when pulling down illegal buildings.

- Do you see local public institutions opening up toward the idea of consulting more with citizens? Are they starting to experiment in how to do this in a meaningful way?

Introduced in 2004, the new Law on Local Government provides citizens with a variety of new rights in their relationships with local governments. However, citizens are unaccustomed to the new opportunities for communication with their local representatives. The most intensive communication between citizens and local authorities is in the area of spatial planning and development. Most consultations are done through public hearings on local spatial plans, despite the fact that public hearings are just *one* of many citizens' participation mechanisms provided for under the new law. The local authorities rarely assess citizens' opinions on certain issues or work more directly to involve them in decision-making.

- Do you see the space for consultation with citizens expanding for other groups and social interests in addition to the ones you've been working on?

Local government rarely takes into account vulnerable groups, for instance, economically disadvantaged groups like the disabled. Local government adjusts the local participation process to their own agenda when possible, choosing to ignore such groups. There is definitely room for more improvement in the quality of participation of these groups in society.

An Urban Regeneration Model:

Local Community Participation in Neighborhood Rehabilitation, Planning, and Implementation in Budapest's Eighth District Magdolna Quarter

Dániel Horváth and Nóra Teller

The Magdolna Quarter of Budapest's Eighth District has often been regarded as a no-go area blighted by poverty, unemployment, and crime, where innovative social policies had little chance of improving the plight of the neighborhood. Starting in 2005, a new effort was made that brought together donors, local government, institutes, and the local community in the redesign of Mátyás Square as part of a larger effort to rehabilitate the area. This article explains how the intervention was brought about and how local people were motivated to join the effort to regain "ownership" of their community.

The framework

The Magdolna Quarter lies in one of the central districts of Budapest. It has always been a transitory area and since the Second World War has been synonymous with poor-quality housing. During the political transition in

the early 1990s, it was recognized as an area in heavy decline with an increasingly impoverished population living largely below the average Budapest standard (i.e., 15 times more no-comfort dwellings as ratio of the total stock than elsewhere in the city), suffering serious unemployment (double that of Budapest), criminality

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and the presence of prostitution, and a population relying mostly on social services and benefits. The overrepresentation of poor Roma households contributed to the comparably large ratio of vulnerable families in the district.

These circumstances were exacerbated by the social and economic effects of the transition—a deepening gap between the Magdolna Quarter and the surrounding neighborhoods and the city as a whole was emerging.

It was recognized early enough both by local policymakers and the research community that the serious social disadvantages and increasing segregation of the local residents in Magdolna can only be halted within the framework of an integrated program that builds upon its achievements. It has been also acknowledged that this is how accumulated disadvantages across generations of local families can be gradually decreased and how inherited poverty can be prevented. Any lack of the harmonization of the sub-programs can extinguish the benefits achieved through one program but not supported by the others. But the harmonization of sub-programs has several conditions: appropriate political, professional, and institutional prerequisites have to be in place.

This article elaborates a crucial cross-cutting aspect that feeds into all three and, at the same time, grounds them: public participation in planning, implementation, and maintaining development projects.

Eighth district—The organization

The City of Budapest and the Local Government of Józsefváros (Eighth District) specifically established a company—Rév8, Urban Renewal and Development of Józsefváros Plc.—in 1997 to elaborate and manage different urban development projects. Thirty people with different qualifications have been working on different urban development projects since 2000. The first large project undertaken and led by the organization focused on developing and managing the Corvin Promenade project in the central quarter of Józsefváros through large-scale real estate development measures. In this project a part of the district has virtually begun to disappear and a new quarter is emerging.¹

In Magdolna Quarter, however, the aim has been a social intervention that targets the residing population, thus enhancing the opportunities for vulnerable groups that would be able to stay in the developing area. For the Magdolna Quarter, a neighborhood with approximately

12,000 inhabitants, a social rehabilitation program was developed by Rév8 as a long-term regeneration initiative for a 15-year period.

Because there have not been any similar urban regeneration programs in Hungary so far, an experimental phase was set up between 2005 and 2008. The regeneration has taken place based on the cooperation and co-financing of the Budapest City Council and the local government of Józsefváros. The total budget of the pilot phase is EUR 3.1 million.

The general purpose of the model program is to introduce a new urban rehabilitation method in Hungary. Each program element is built upon *active public involvement* that is elaborated by Rév8 in cooperation with several civil organizations and other research institutes, e.g., research departments of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, universities, etc. As a result, both planning the activities and implementing the set interventions are based on public involvement, which has been recognized as the only way to achieve the set objectives of the Magdolna Quarter Program. Nevertheless, public involvement is not the goal *per se*; it is one of the tools for community development, which again is one of the crucial elements of the program. Based on its local features, only a socially oriented, complex regeneration could be accomplished here, which means that investments in infrastructure and service delivery target the current inhabitants. The goal is to keep the majority of the local population (population retention) and, in parallel, improve the socio-economic level of the target area closer to the surrounding areas.

Active public involvement should also serve as a catalyst for public initiatives, and thereby create an individually shaped and attractive part of the city by establishing new public and cultural spaces and the renewal of existing ones.

1 22 hectares of land are affected, 1,400 public dwellings and private dwellings are refurbished, 3,000 new dwellings are constructed, 5,000 parkingplaces, approximately 50,000 square meters of cultural and service area will be established. The complete public space will be redesigned by 2012. The budget for the project is EUR 500 million plus EUR 70 million for public programs such as innovation and research facilities. See http://www.corvinsetany.hu/ujbelvaros_fejlesztesfazisai.php.

Cooperation and public participation in Magdolna

Cooperation and public participation are the keywords of the Magdolna project. Establishing the channels and collaboration forms as well as revitalizing the existing ones among the different stakeholders are the mission of the experimental period of the regeneration activities. The most important task is to make up for the lack of dialog among the sectors (municipality, civil organizations, institutes, citizens, enterprises, etc.) and administrative levels so far, in order to build new bridges among the different urban stakeholders and to enhance their confidence in the process.

The multiple role of the renewal of Mátyás Square in the regeneration project

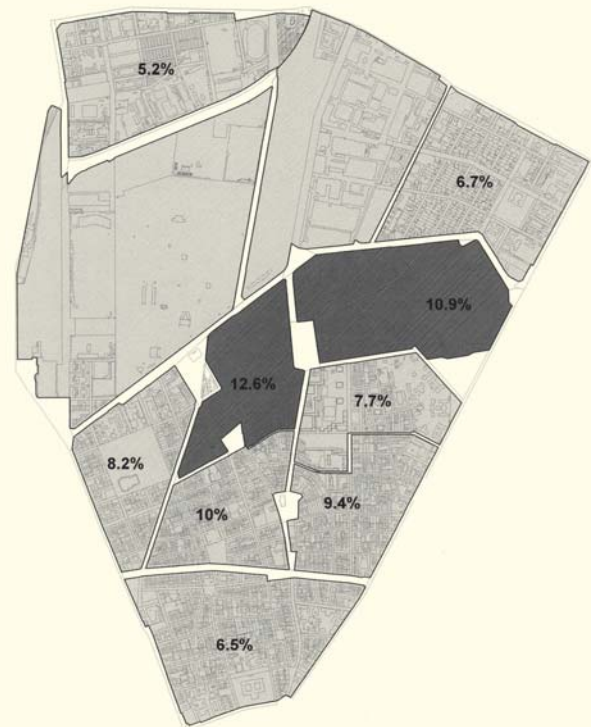
The first action focus of public area development within the Magdolna Quarter Program was Mátyás Square, the main public square of Magdolna neighborhood. Mátyás Square is situated in the geographical center of Józsefváros and at the same time it is in the middle of one of the earliest built-up areas of the district. This area belongs to the periphery of Budapest's inner city, with a very dense residential fabric. One of the most important parameters of this neighborhood is its run-down architectural and physical characteristics.

The square was partly renewed in 2002 but the regeneration process then did not affect the original "functions" of the area: e.g., a significant concentration of homeless people and sex workers.

The first interventions undertaken in 2002, largely targeting the partial physical renewal of the square, did not result in a multiple usage for the residents. Thus the square's (mal)functions remained mostly untouched; in the center of the square there was a small playground in a low-quality park environment and some benches. It did not constitute a popular place to be, but the area did not offer any other recreational facilities. In 2005, the goals and actions were renewed by the municipality based on the regeneration concept of Magdolna Quarter made by Rév8 for the next 15 years.

A new target had to be defined: to continue renewal with the involvement of the local community that can, in the end, create and maintain a community

Figure 1.
Central Budapest—Share of Population
Living Only on Social Benefits



Source: Census Data 2001.

place that could become a meeting point for different social groups along with a sense of ownership. This way, Mátyás Square can serve to integrate and rebuild the identity of the area and the district. According to Rév8's aims, the cohesion of the local residents is strengthened not only because the square is re-utilized by the residents but also through their involvement in the design and implementation of the new green area. This contributes to awareness building and to enabling citizens to be involved in decisions concerning their quality of life. The project also aims to help retain residents in the neighborhood and enhance living standards.

In the framework of environment and physical development, actually, several more action areas have been set up in the target area: there are four condominiums where participatory planning has been implemented for two years, not only during the preparation but also during the maintenance phase. Making the covered courtyards greener in the municipal buildings has been

another successful community initiative during the last two years.²

The pilot project —Targets and actions

The main goal of the revised renewal activity has been the creation of a high-quality and well-maintained urban green space with new public functions for residents.

The renewal project launched in 2005 formulated the following aims:

- redevelopment of the run-down area;
- provision of good-quality green space that matches local identity;
- promoting green space integration within a “special” social environment and its acceptance by the public;
- using green space to improve the social character of the area;
- improving public security.

The preparation and the implementation phases of the pilot project were achieved from 2005 until March 2008, including public discussions on demands and expectations of local residents. The preparation phase was a lengthy period, with parallel initiatives that at the end augmented the implementation.

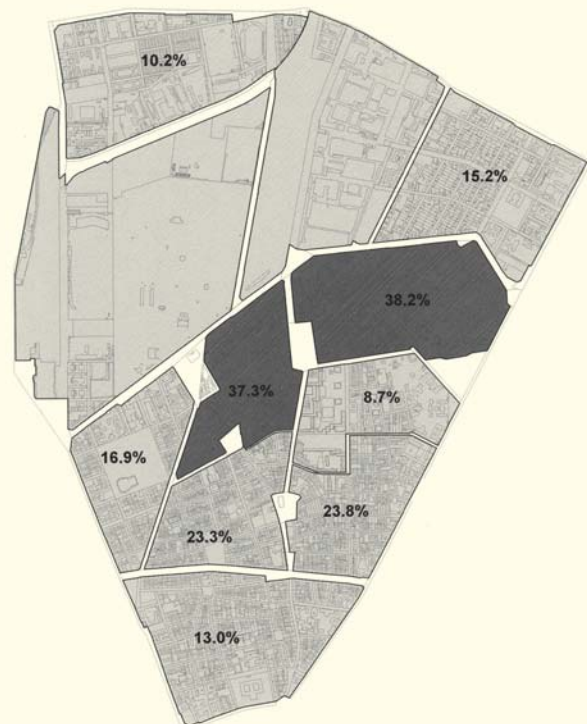
The initial communication activities of Rév8 were launched in October 2005 by distributing colorful leaflets and organizing a “kick-off” meeting for the residents. Two further meetings with the public were held a few months later in February and March 2006, all of which were announced in the local newspaper, and also on posters and the Internet. Besides these conversations about the local needs and about what to establish and how to renew the square, a survey was carried out at the end of 2005 and beginning of 2006. One of the institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences cooperated in carrying out the survey. One of the most important messages both from the consultations and the survey was that 80 percent of the affected public

would happily participate in the implementation and the maintenance phase, too.

March 2006 was the next milestone in the renewal process: an agreement about the cooperation between Corvinus University Budapest and the Eighth District was signed on the planning and implementation of the project. During this month, based on the comments and demands of hundreds of local inhabitants, three different concepts were developed and presented in a meeting held in mid-March where both professionals and the public participated. Planning was carried out publicly—students came and researched the role and history of Mátyás Square and interviewed local inhabitants.

At the end, based on the comments received in March, one final plan was developed and presented to the public in May. The presentation was organized in the framework of an open-air gathering, where demonstration and communication materials were widely applied (see methods above). The inhabitants could vote for the structures that would be built in the square.

Figure 2.
Share of No-comfort Dwellings in Magdolna



Source: Census data, 2001

² The renewal of the Mátyás Square is not the sole action area of the Magdolna Quarter Program, for, at the same time, the Community House has been renovated and there are projects run together with the local school, etc.

After the discussions on the planning were closed in the third quarter of 2006, the district prepared the implementation plans and changed the master plan accordingly. The final plans were presented to the public in a manner to similar to previous phases (posters, leaflets, presentations, etc.) in September in the framework of “Health Day,” a very popular occasion in the district.

The implementation activity of the project was divided into two parts. The first stage, financed by GreenKeys, commenced in December 2006 by creating so-called “sitting hills” for the square as an alternative to benches. Pupils of one of the schools in Magdolna District, local NGOs, and students at Corvinus University participated in this action. By mid-April 2007, the new structure (pathways, main green space, etc.) were established. A new pavement was constructed according to the previously explored demands. Replanting was organized and placement of the “sitting hills” was carried out with public participation in two days during spring 2007, for which local residents were invited via announcements (newspapers, leaflets) and personal contact with Rév8 and NGOs.

The second phase of the implementation comprised establishing a new playground and fences and new public lighting and security services; new plants were placed in the square by residents, politicians, and NGOs during two days of voluntary work in autumn 2007.

In a later phase of the Magdolna Rehabilitation Project, the surrounding streets will also be renovated. Thus the project affecting Mátyás Square will go on and it will be strengthened in its function as an axis of the development processes in this neighborhood. The planned semi-pedestrian streets in the direction of Horváth Mihály Square and also Teleki Square will create new types of connections between downtown Budapest and the neighborhood. A community-orientated sports courtyard near the local school and a new public space with a recreation function on Dankó Street will accomplish a complex community service for different social groups.

In total, there have been five to six financial sources for the project: EU funding—GreenKeys and ASTUTE, the Hungarian Management Authority, the City Council of Budapest (80 percent of the budget), and of course the district. This type of multi-source financing is atypical in Hungary. In addition, a non-calculated added value was achieved by public participation in the implementation phase: the planting of the area by the public in approximately six hours. The total budget of the green space development was EUR 200,000.

Challenges and benefits of participatory planning, implementation, and maintenance

Despite efforts by the Rév8 team, the participation of local residents has declined as compared to the very beginning of the program. It is also true that after the decline in the second part of the preparatory phase, the involvement of local residents was more successful in the implementation stage. Making local people participate is costly in the short-term because awareness building and empowerment are the basis for real participation. These, however, presuppose knowledge and information, elements that vulnerable groups typically lack, and which have required a lot of time and human resources on the side of the project team to transfer and to achieve awareness about the stake of local involvement. Regarding the long-term maintenance of project results, the additional cost of participation will most probably “return” by ensuring “ownership” of the project results.

After the implementation, however, it seems to be even more important how the maintenance of the square is going to be organized: the financing of park keepers and social workers will be covered in the next period of the Magdolna Regeneration Program financed by the EU. According to the plans, the local neighborhood council and local institutes (Community House, Elementary and Secondary School, Youth Help Service) will be involved in maintenance, public safety, and public relations.

The benefits of the program are clear: as opposed to any other projects, there is an intensive public participation which has a legitimization effect and gives a valuable input into the planning. Numerous tools serve this latter goal: discussions, surveys, local forums (workshops and events), giving access to information through printed media and leaflets. These findings stem from the continuous monitoring of the effects of the program, which is carried out by a specialized staff at Rév8. Recent meetings and surveys already show the first results that may come from the implementation of the development program.

To sum up: the involvement of stakeholders, residents, professionals, and NGOs is not only a prerequisite set by law, but a real tool to enhance community building, build confidence, and shape the identity of local residents and the target residential area. Involvement in implementation and maintenance

transfers real responsibilities to inhabitants, which serves the sustainability of projects of this kind.

But such an approach also needs a suitable continuous institutional framework for regional and local development. The threat in Hungary now is that the amplification of the “planning” regime of the running regional development funding (i.e., EU Structural and

Cohesion Funds and national co-financing) requires technical documentation and implementation plans that allow for too little flexibility, time, and participation in planning and thus implementation. This will most probably affect the next phase of the Magdolna Program’s success, too.

The Struggle for Hunyadi Square

Residents vs. Budapest's Sixth District City Hall

Gabó Bartha

Local governments can be as opaque and dishonest as they can be transparent and accountable—as well as deaf to citizens' desires. Likewise, neighborhood rehabilitation can be a byword for profiteering on the part of local governments. Here, the case of the planned development of Hunyadi Square in Budapest charts the obstacles to public participation by an activist who has seen some battles won and some lost in her effort to stop the eradication of Budapest's last downtown outdoor market.

I suspect democracy requires this kind of physical involvement, not just to put our desires out there with a high level of insistence, but even to discover what we think and feel.

—Bob Hicok, poet

“We treasure our market – Hunyadi Square” or *Kincsünk a piac – Hunyadi tér* (KAP-HT) started as an informal initiative in Budapest in August 2007 to respond to the Sixth District's plan regarding the renovation of the Hunyadi market hall and “rehabilitation” of the area.

Hunyadi Square is in the buffer zone of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Andrásy Avenue, in

downtown Budapest. Architecturally, the square has kept its atmosphere from the end of the 19th century. Its park with old trees is one of the largest of the few small parks in the district. The market hall, slightly over 100 years old, is in the process of becoming listed by the Cultural Heritage Office. Opposite the hall, by the side of the park, is an open-air market,

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Volunteers collecting signatures

PHOTO BY GABÓ BARTHA

the last of its kind in downtown Budapest, where a good part of the merchandise comes from small producers.

Hunyadi Square's market hall is one of six market halls built simultaneously in Budapest almost a century ago, and it has not been renovated for some time. The outside of the building is crumbling and the inside of the hall is rundown and in need of a facelift. The apartments situated above the hall are almost completely emptied of their inhabitants. The square is not kept clean and the playground is more frequently used by dogs than children. An area in the square is a meeting point for homeless people who often sell bric-a-brac.

The open-air market at Hunyadi Square has been my main source of food since 1995. I appreciate three things about this market: it has a good selection of fresh fruits and vegetables often picked the same day; rarer produce, like chard, rhubarb, and Jerusalem artichokes, unavailable elsewhere, is for sale; and its atmosphere and location by the park.

I began taking pictures of the vendors in the summer of 2005 when rumors of the outdoor market's move to the market hall basement started to circulate. I told the vendors that I would like to take photos because I wanted to document something that soon might not be there. Many of them said that they would stop coming if they had to work in the basement after the renovation.

I did not check then with the local government what exactly was going to happen.

By June 2007, I revisited the market development issue during an international workshop on art, urbanism, and public spaces. Having spent more time than usual at the outside market talking with the vendors and buyers, it became obvious that there was a major lack of information among them, and that the market community was quite demoralized. They were also skeptical regarding changes since they had seen previous renovation plans fail to materialize. It was also clear that the vendors felt that they had no say in the processes related to the square and the market, and that they did not see the point of raising any issues with the Sixth District local government.

It was a coincidence that on the week of the work-shop I saw the agenda of the district assembly meeting posted on the gate of the market. It included a point on modification of a "syndicate contract" related to the square! I tried to attend the meeting but it was an endless affair from noon to late night and it was not predictable when Hunyadi Square was going to be discussed. At 9:30 P.M., when I returned for the third time to the meeting, I had just missed it. It requires quite some determination to make sure one does catch the issue!

The next day I started to look for the contract that was going to be modified, based on the decision from

the meeting. Even if it was a public document, it was nearly impossible to find it on the local government website. I called the government offices several times for help and eventually found both the contract from 2005 and the proposed modification.

The plan in 2005 was that a project company (75 percent investor, 25 percent local government) would renovate the market hall and turn it into a “House of Europe,” i.e., a shopping and entertainment center, and move the indoor market from the first floor into the underground garage to be built under the whole square. This would require cutting down the old trees and erasing the last downtown open-air market. The investor would have the right of pre-emptive purchase for all the ground-floor properties looking onto the square that belong to the local government, except for the ones with current leases. But the existing rental contracts were going to be terminated if the profile of the occupying business did not fit into the changed socio-economic profile of the square. The local government would allow the project company to have property rights for the superstructure of the garage, and it would cease the contracts of the old renters inside the market hall as soon as the permit of use was ready. The new rental fees could not be more than double the current fees. After renovation, the local government would pass the right of use and utilization for 50 years to the project company for HUF 10,000 per square meter per year, under the market price.

According to this contract, the project company is obliged to inform the inhabitants of the square and the vendors about the “rehabilitation” project through public forums organized by the local government. Their needs have to be taken into consideration as much as possible.

The cherry on top is that the contract was signed by the twenty-something daughter of the investor, who, at the same time, was the lawyer who wrote and countersigned the contract.

I try to summarize here the modifications suggested to the local government assembly to be included in the 2007 contract: the garage will be only under 40 percent of the square with the immediate request to increase the area to 65 percent; the market will not be in the garage, it will be partially in the basement of the market hall (partially is not defined) and partially where it is, within an “enlarged” area.

This contract was no joke and more tangible than the previous rumors. I felt that this needed immediate investigation and action. People needed to find out about the plans and be given a chance to react, and the local government must be accountable for its decisions.

In the following weeks, I tried to involve and inform as many people as possible and to encourage smaller groups or individuals to act along the lines of their interests, curiosity, and competence. I also contacted a couple of organizations that work on



Hunyadi Square Market

PHOTO BY CABO BARTHA

environmental issues, architectural preservation, and other civil matters. Soon I was not alone. “Kincsünk a piac—Hunyadi tér” was formed as a resident’s group by August 2007. A website was created to show the developments and findings (available online: <http://www.lmv.hu/hunyadi>).

First, we found out that there was no tender offer for the project, a process required by law.

A simple Google search also resulted in articles related to the investor and its previous dealings. For example, the residents of a World Heritage building, Andrassy 21, bought by the company in question, filed a lawsuit against the company and won the first round. Like the Andrassy 21 residents, the inhabitants of the surrounding area have not been involved in the planning, nor have they been informed about the “House of Europe” and underground garage project. Between 2005 and 2007, no building plans were presented publicly except for the district development plan that was posted for a month in the building of the local government.

Further investigations revealed that at the time of contracting the Hunyadi market, the biggest share in the investor company was owned by an offshore company based in the Marshall Islands, named Labor Ltd. One wonders how the local government checked for any conflicts of interest between Labor Ltd. and the members of its own district council.

The first interview with a local MP about the Hunyadi Square project appeared in the July/August 2007 issue of the district’s newspaper. The local MP claimed that NGOs and locals had been involved in the planning process. But when asked in writing for the official minutes and other documents showing the participation process mentioned by the MP, government officials could not provide any evidence of locals’ participation. What we received to our enquiry were copies of the communication related to the official process of negotiations and approval. Some NGOs as well as relevant authorities reviewed the development plan in 2005 and some of them had serious concerns and objections or preferred not to support it in its presented form. This feedback may have been taken into consideration to a limited extent and reflected in the changes in the 2007 contract, which was engineered, nevertheless, away from public view.

The interview with the MP went on to depict the bright future of the square when everything will be modernized, when the market will be cleaned up and exiled under the ground, the hall will be transformed into a place for businesses “representing the values

and diversity of the EU,” and there will be cafés and restaurants everywhere looking onto the square. But the “House of Europe” concept was a fallacy, not a well-developed concept; the local government could not present a detailed concept on request, neither during nor after a personal meeting with the head of the Division of Proprietors.

KAP-HT decided to put an end to the lack of information for the inhabitants and market vendors and hold a forum in early September 2007. The aim of the forum was to present the situation based on the “syndicate contract” more accurately than the local government’s newspaper did, and to draw the attention of the media to the situation. We have distributed flyers in two rounds—once over 3,000 copies of our four-page brochure were placed in mailboxes, and again approximately the same number was distributed with invitations to the forum. We rented a room in a school looking on the square, and it was filled partly with about 80 citizens: locals, other NGO representatives and activists, and representatives of the media. To our surprise, there wasn’t anyone who spoke against our position. Many of those who came supported our next step with their signatures to submit the contract to the Public Administration office¹ for a legal review. New people who wanted to be actively involved joined us.

Our reports on the contract and its perceived offenses to the Office of Public Administration and to the Public Prosecutor’s Office, our petition, the hundreds of letters sent to the district mayor, our regular visits to the assembly meetings, and press conferences resulted in the annulment of the contract in October 2007.

A new chapter of planning related to Hunyadi Square opened thereafter, although trust was not regained with the leadership of the local government. There were several indications that the Hunyadi project was not an open question and there seems to be vested interests to build an underground garage by any means. In response, the Sixth District’s mayor announced that the district did not want the “House of Europe” concept anymore, that it wants to keep the market hall, and the outside market, too, but that it does not want the garage. The district realized that, to an extent, it could not go against the opinion of the locals.

¹ The governmental office supervising the legal functioning of local governments.

Invitation to the public forum

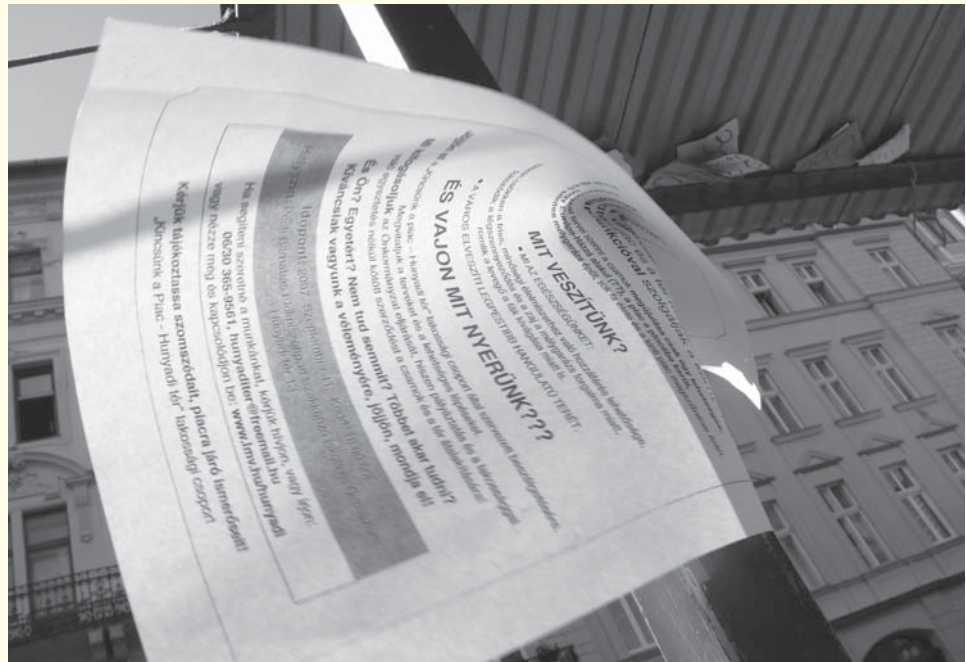


PHOTO COURTESY OF TIBOR VARNAGY

In January 2008, the local government hired the Budapest city government's planning agency, Studio Metropolitana (SM), to write the integrated district development strategy (IDS) and create a legitimate project for Hunyadi Square, involving those with more and with less voice. The IDS is a document that is required by the EU when submitting applications for support—and of course the district would greatly benefit from such an opportunity for funding. IDSs have to be made with public participation. Creating a development project with broad support for the Square requires the participation of local people and other stakeholders. Hunyadi Square would be an action zone for the district because it lies in a central and very desirable place.

The public part of the planning process started in March 2008. We wondered if the new planning process would really bring transparency to the local government's decision-making? Would the district politicians who supported an unlawful, nontransparent plan a few months ago suddenly take citizens' views seriously or would it be just window-dressing with the district politicians following their interests instead of being accountable to the public and respond to the needs of citizens?

For KAP-HT it has been a real dilemma how to participate in the process. There was a fear that the local government would justify its plans with our participation, even if we did not agree with these plans. Therefore, we have participated in meetings and have regularly expressed our opinions during the stages of the

participatory process, which, in our view, could have been done much more convincingly. Our letters to SM during this process went unanswered (some of these letters/expressions of our positions were copied to the assembly members and the mayor, but they did not reply to us either). According to the leader of SM, letter writing was not an acceptable tool in this process. They made a rule that communication is supposed to be one way. The locals express what they want and the "professional experts" then write these into oh-so-professional documents, apparently without too many chances for further comment and review. The commission has been timed to the EU proposal submission deadline so the participatory planning process suffered from a shortage of time.

In May 2008 the IDS writing ended. It was not a process that attempted consensus. The majority of participants in the "planning process" did not see the point of any garage under the Square and did not agree to it. The final material SM produced contains a huge, 500-car underground garage—a plan that was not mentioned during our "planning sessions." Our fears that the same project would come back "laundered" were partly realized.

The local government is announcing a tender now for a project that would retain the outside market, keep the market hall as a food market, and add an underground garage.

KAP-HT, and other people and participating organizations also wonder: who wants it and what for?

The Community Budget

An Interesting Topic for Citizens!

Kristina Creosteanu

Citizens need information in a simple, digestible form if they are to understand the budget of their local authority and its implications. They are turned off by confusing tables and excessive jargon. If local government is serious about attracting community participation, then clear, concise presentation of the budget is one way to do so.

Budgets and budgeting are an “exciting topic” for economists, accountants, and even developers.

But not for citizens!

However, this does not mean that citizens do not want to know how the money from their taxes is spent on public services and public works to make their lives easier in their neighborhoods—or to make the schools a better place for their kids. Talking about money and especially about public money is sensitive and may seem complicated. Thus, it is up to local authorities to make the budget an “interesting” and “exciting” topic worthy of open discussion and debate, and they should not underestimate the abilities of their constituents.

From my experience of working directly with local governments, citizens, and their community-based structures, the average Romanian is open, creative, active, and willing to be involved in the decision-making regarding his or her community. Sometimes the citizen

is far in advance of his or her representatives or public servants.

The law says!

Romanian legislation provides a consistent framework for citizen participation in budget-related issues. Public Finance Law No. 189/2001 provides that citizen consultation on budget issues is a compulsory step in local budget approval; Law No. 52/2003 concerning local government transparency also requires that local governments inform their citizens on the decisions to be made by local councils, including the draft budget and any other activities involving public money; and Law No. 141/2004 provides for citizens’ right to promote legislative initiatives, including those concerning the public allocation of money.

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Fake transparency?

Some local governments in Romania have been running public hearings on draft and approved budgets since the late 1990s. In rural areas, public hearings on the approved budget are a current procedure. Small communities have come together to analyze their leaders' performance using scarce financial resources. There also are a number of large cities that have held public hearings on their draft budgets since 2000. Still, there is no systematic approach to bringing the budget to the citizens' attention and inviting them to contribute to the decision-making about budget allocations for the best for their community.

In 2003, the Government Reform Project GRASP organized 22 public hearings in cities like Sibiu, Mediaș, Tulcea, Giurgiu, and Brașov; towns like Cristuru Secuiesc, Măcin, Babadag, Agnita, and Însurăței; and communes like Vârșag, Șura Mare, Rășinari, Cristian, Remetea, Frumoasa, Deveselu, Fărcașele, Vlădila, Stoienești; and from the County Council of Sibiu in two locations—Avrig (inviting representatives from eight communes) and Săliște (11 commune representatives).

That being said, in gathering the information for this article, I found that there exists no comprehensive, official account of how many local governments are implementing the budget transparency process. Budget information is neither available on the official websites of the Romanian government nor on associative structures like the Association of Romanian Municipalities or Association of Romanian Towns. In short, there is no monitoring system. For this article, information came from my direct work experience in the GRASP project and from contacting (meetings, tours in the communities, questionnaires) and visiting 52 communities in 14 out of Romania's 41 counties. Vast improvement is required in the monitoring system in order to retrieve fast, reliable information on local government budgets in Romania.

Community pressure!

When citizens, community-based organizations, media, the private sector, political representatives and NGOs started requesting information from public authorities on local budget implementation or proposing projects, services, activities, or events to be financed with public money, both the petitioners and civil servants faced new

situations and topics, for which procedures had to be established.

Although the forms and procedures used in informing the public are more or less standardized by law, each public institution set a certain process for informing and consulting the citizens, in accordance with the structure of their organization and legal provisions.

The Romanian *Guide on Budget Transparency* was created and distributed in order to provide information and guidance on the budget transparency process through citizens' involvement and to support local governments and civil society to implement this process. The guide was distributed in 2004 to all 41 county councils and to 500 local councils all around Romania.

Budget transparency!

In brief, local budget transparency is a five-step process comprising the following:

1. **Consult the citizens** as beneficiaries of the local budget.

Tool: focus groups, to consult beneficiaries of the local budget on criteria for allocating money to different sectors and institutions. For example, education allocations might include school rehabilitation, maintenance, modernization, and adjustment to new standards, but the limited amount of money reveals the need to prioritize projects based on criteria like urgency, importance, and the impact of interventions. Each year there will be a number of "winners" and a list of those waiting for the next year's budget.

2. **Consult citizens** on capital investment priorities for their community.

Tool: an opinion survey to consult citizens about community needs, capital investment priorities, and where to make budget cuts. For example, citizens will set as priorities a number of capital investments like road repairs, better traffic management, or a new community center in the city and will propose a certain dynamic of these investments upon their needs. Even if the decision-makers make a different decision, they at least are aware of the community's perceptions and expectations. On the other hand, people will understand that, like in a household, one investment may require budget cuts from another expenditure!

3. **Inform citizens** on the local budget structure and implementation.

Tool: Leaflet to briefly describe the budget, informing citizens on the local budget structure and its implementation. This leaflet is a very simple, concise, and concrete presentation of the revenues collected from taxpayers and other sources like the central budget and international grants as well as the expenditures the community has or wants to make for the good of the people. The Budget in Brief leaflet is a standard information material, as the structure of the local budget is standard and enforced by law.

4. **Consult citizens** on local budget draft for the next year.

Tool: public hearing to present the local government's budget conditions and consult citizens for their ideas on the local budget draft for the next year. Most important is that people are participating, asking questions about money allocations, proposing new services, capital investments, or other developments, and debating their leaders' intentions for the present and future of the community. It is important the citizens have their voice!

5. **Inform citizens** of the impact of their proposals on the budget and the community.

Tool: public meeting, taking place after budget approval by the local councils, to inform citizens of the impact of their proposals on local budget operation. It is important to register and to make public citizens' opinions on the budget and to reveal which of their opinions are to be taken into consideration for the budget approval and which of them will not and why!

matters with citizens, learn how to answer questions and not to fear the answers, and learn to be direct and frank when discussing problems and to be accepting of others' opinions.

Local government representatives learn to implement a process consisting of a complete and comprehensive set of citizen participation tools related to the budget calendar and to make the budget a real tool for community management. Public servants learn how to become better communicators, to renounce to their "technical" language, and to support both their leaders and citizen understanding of the budget operation.

Community-based structures like condominium associations, citizen consulting committees/advisory boards, and neighborhood leaders' groups learn to cooperate with the local government in order to have a voice in how the money is expended for the community benefit and learn how to bring into the process the citizens they are representing. It is important for them to participate in the process and to try to be efficient by promoting constructive suggestions.

NGOs learn how to cooperate with the local government in implementing specific citizen participation tools, how to run the process, how to help local government to bring people to community events and decision-making activities. They learn how to evolve from an intermediary between the citizens and the local government to a partner of both sides.

Citizens are the final beneficiaries and actors in this process. They become knowledgeable about budget content, possibilities, opportunities, and limitations and they are more and more involved in participating in the decision-making on public money allocation. Usually, once motivated, people get very involved in the process and come with common sense and constructive and creative solutions and projects. Proposals, suggestions, and questions raised by citizens improve budget expenditure and focus it on community priorities.

All the best!

The following paragraphs highlight how budget transparency is good for the entire community.

The elected officials become more responsive and more responsible in using public money, according to the needs and expectations that citizens have. They also learn to use citizen participation tools to keep in touch with the citizens and adjust their decisions to the community's priorities. Elected officials learn to present their intentions related to money spending in front of their constituents, learn how to discuss openly these

How to Improve Participatory Budgeting in Romania and Elsewhere

Attendance

- ***Consult public institutions early in the budget process!***

If representatives of the public institutions receiving local budget allocations (education, culture, health, social services, public services) could be consulted during the preparatory stages of the local budget, these institutions would be much more likely to participate in public meetings on the local budget draft.

- ***Inform citizens about expenditures throughout the year!***

In order to attract citizens' interest towards budget issues, they should be informed periodically (monthly, quarterly, or as needed) about the expenditures involving public money. In this way they become aware, more interested, and more involved in community life. It is a process that needs time, effort, and persistence from the local government!

- ***Explain budget problems and listen to citizen proposals!***

Citizens will participate in the activities initiated by the local government if they understand what the problem is and what they are expected to do; they may have initiatives, ideas, and proposals sometimes unexpectedly useful and practical even for local government professionals! It is correct and useful to listen to citizens!

- ***Encourage elected officials to attend public budget hearings!***

Elected officials, members of the local and county councils, should be invited to the budget drafting and citizen participation events; they will have a closer understanding of citizens' needs and expectations concerning the spending of public money.

- ***Issue regular expenditure reports to facilitate transparency!***

The local government departments could issue quarterly reports on the expenditures concerning different activities and/or programs. This procedure would ease the expenditure registration in the local government accounting system (daily, monthly, and quarterly financial excess in the current account) and would increase the departments' level of financial self-control.

Transparency

- ***Inform the citizenry of any money used from future budgets!***

Sometimes the National Budget Laws are delayed, so the law provides that the local governments are allowed to spend money from the next year's budget up to a certain limit. In these circumstances, the local governments should report the money used from the future budget before the local budget is adopted.

- ***Hold public meetings to achieve responsibility and cooperation!***

The public meeting is a communication exercise between the local government and the citizens. A necessary and sometimes difficult exercise! The result of this exercise is that both the citizens and the local government become more responsible with each other and learn how to cooperate for the community's prosperity.

Participation and the Case for Open Society

Katalin Pallai

Public participation may become no more than rhetoric among administrators who prefer to rely on the “experts” rather than listen to the voices of community people. This article asks what can be done to enhance public participation’s status within the open society agenda.

In this paper I write about the relation of participation to local leadership and strategy. By local strategy I mean the agreed solution for complex challenges, like local development, area development, rehabilitation, etc. While I truly believe that choice among service options and users’ assessment of various services are also important means of participation in the local policy process, my focus in this paper is on the other trend in local participation: the one that encourages public dialog and community thinking about local strategies. My question in this paper is why this second trend of participation, the one embedded in the concept of governance, is less common in our region (CEE and SEE).

My starting point is a paradox that you often confront when you work with local governments in CEE and SEE: in talks and discussions local decision-makers widely acknowledge the importance and necessity of wider stakeholder participation in the local strategy process. Statements that you hear in short talks

are, in general, politically correct and reflect the values of open society. However, when you scratch the surface by initiating discussions on some real-life challenges or actual situations, the results are very different. If you go one step further, and you look at the landscape of practices, you will find little evidence that the same decision-makers implement in their practice the values they have just declared.

The “lessons” that the “average decision-maker” has already learned

I often teach/hold local strategy, policy, and diversity management trainings for LGI and also for other clients in the region. In all of them, the role of stakeholder participation in the policy process is a crucial theme. During the last few years, decision-makers participating in my trainings could easily compile a good list of reasons

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why we establish participatory policy processes. They usually state with an air of confidence that stakeholder participation helps to adjust policies to the needs and aspirations of stakeholders, enhances ownership and commitment, helps leverage resources, and strengthens capacity for implementation and monitoring, and so on. The rapidly assembled lists would fill any innocent observer with satisfaction: yes, decision-makers have learned the first important lesson on the importance of stakeholder participation in the policy process.

However, the nice feeling suddenly evaporates after the next question: how much do you use participatory methods in your local strategy process? The short answer to this question is usually: “Not too much.” The longer answer is a litany¹ of why they are not in the position to encourage more stakeholder participation.

The obstacles that the “average decision-maker” sees

Many decision-makers blame citizen apathy for the lack of participation. They claim that when public forums are organized, citizens do not show up, or if they do, they only complain about their narrow problems and do not understand the scope of the meeting.

The initial venting of stakeholders’ frustration is a normal feature at the beginning of a participatory process, especially if the partners do not have a previous history of working together. The process must be designed and led in a manner that turns this negative energy of frustration into a positive energy of communication, trust, and cooperation.

The other type of bad experience decision-makers report is that some loud voices, representing only a fragment of stakeholders, capture the event and distort results. In our transitional societies, where civil society and organized mechanisms for representing people’s interests are weak and sporadic, rapid processes that only reach out to the already organized interest groups logically lead to the representation of only a fragment of the stakeholders. Such processes can easily lead to biased results. Still, in most reported participatory cases this limited and biased outreach is the practice.

Both scenarios can obviously be the result of weak professional skills in mobilizing, organizing, and managing participation. The sad fact is that both can easily produce perverse results and work against just outcomes.²

Not only decision-makers, but civil servants often equally lack the skills and experience for organizing participatory processes. They usually blame the local politicians for the lost opportunities. They complain about “bad local politicians.” They claim that local politicians are involved in short-sighted, competitive political games. Communication for them is a tool to make deals or to sell ideas in order to win support. They do not “waste” time, energy, or money to establish and sustain democratic dialogue. They lack aspiration to become “local statesmen” working on a better future for the community.

The connection is rarely made or realized that a weak civil society with large, excluded population groups is the other side of a local community led by “bad politicians” and manipulative, one-way communication. This is the pattern of a closed society³ reproducing itself in a vicious cycle that somebody has to break, somehow.

The crucial problem is that it is tremendously difficult to break this cycle as the players (or rather the “condition” of the players) are solidly knit together. On the one side sit the groups of unaware, uninformed citizens who do not realize they could and should hold local politicians accountable for responding to their aspirations. On the other side are the politicians who, on the one hand, think they know what people need and who, on the other hand, are not obliged by the system to find the time, energy, and courage to initiate more democratic processes. All associated “costs” of a democratic dialog would not even pay off within the given system where mandates are for four years and re-election often depends on other factors than local improvements. One sad conclusion is that, without changing the “condition” of and for players, participatory projects supported by external funding will remain only short episodes in the history of the localities.

1 A repetitive list of complaints.

2 For a more detailed explanation of this statement see: Katalin Pallai: “Dilemmas on LED strategies,” *Local Governance Brief*, Vol 7. No. 1. (2006 Spring) pp.18–24.

3 For more on the difference of closed and open societies see: Karl Popper (1945, reprint 2006) *The Open Society and Its Enemies*; and George Soros (2006) “The Age of Fallibility.” *Public Affairs*.

Some drawbacks that more sophisticated analysts could add

Besides the local technocratic tradition of leadership where decision-makers think they know what is best and therefore seriously limit communication on policy, unfortunately, there is another pool of factors in the countries of our region that hinder effective stakeholder participation in the local decision-making process. Both central governments and donors often set up incentive systems for local governments that work against serious strategy making and participation, and it seems that the EU-funding-related mechanisms only reinforce these wrong incentives.

Before the times of local independence, the local governments were deconcentrated units of the public administration. Duties were decided in the center and resources for improvements arrived through vertical channels built on project-based decisions. Local leaders were expected to give “managerial leadership” for the delivery of local services. They could lobby for resources when opportunities opened, doing their best to demonstrate the local need for a given project. The typical goal of a local leader was subsidy maximization, and his routine was to make individual deals with other decision-makers at higher levels in the public administration. A transactional leadership⁴ based on a shorter-term horizon was the effective approach of that era. For such a leadership approach, widely-based local agreements on aspirations, strategy, or community commitment for implementation were not needed, as the solutions for local issues were found not in the community, but in the external subsidy gained through the project-based lobbying. Investments were perceived as “gifts”—no local opinion, no comment or criticism was encouraged. In such an era there was no need for strategy and community involvement in planning. What is more, agreed strategies and commitments would have undermined subsidy maximization.

The fatal problem in our region is that the actual mechanisms of donor support and EU funding keep this wrong-headed tradition vividly alive.

Project-based donor support is in most cases supply driven—the donor has a project idea and looks for local governments who want to take part. The local government can decide whether it grabs the opportunity, or not. Unfortunately, in most cases only the direct costs and benefits of the given project are weighed and not the opportunity costs, or whether the project diverts

attention and energy from issues that would be a higher priority for the community.⁵

EU project funding is a bit better as, in theory, project proposals must be supported by complex strategies for the development of the locality. However, the resulting practice is not much different: when opportunity for a certain type of project is announced, local governments rapidly assemble local strategy documents that can support the desired project proposals. Instead of the long process of building shared visions and agreed strategies, “umbrella documents” are assembled quickly that “cover” the project proposals. In the perception of the technocratic, transactional leaders, shared views about the desired future or commitment along a community strategy would present inertia and limit flexibility for subsidy maximization. “We need project funding, and not strategies” is often the absurd but typical answer of many decision-makers who are would-be-participants in my own local strategy courses when they ask their local governments to pay their tuition fees. These statements clearly reflect a minimalist version of managerial leadership focused on a narrow and technocratic concept of service delivery.

How much decision-makers do not think in terms of community leadership, strategy, dialog, and community building is reflected in all courses where I ask the question, “Who has a local strategy?” In answer, decision-makers often proudly declare that they have more than one strategy in stock! I think this is indicative of the situation where, instead of shared local strategies, unserious “strategy documents” are produced for legitimating various project proposals.

4 The terms and the contrasting of transactional of transformational leadership was first discussed by Burns. The term “transactional leadership” is used for the old approach where leadership is conceived as an exchange (e.g., pay, favors, feelings). Transformational leadership has an approach with a longer, wider focus. Transformational leaders strive for bonding instead of bartering. The focus is on building common vision and empowerment through higher levels of motivation and morality. For more on the difference between transactional and transformational leadership see James MacGregor Burns (1978) *Leadership*. New York: Harper and Row; and for the relevance to local politics see Robin Hambleton (2005) “Leading Localities: Rethinking the Agenda.” In: M. Haus, H. Hubert, and M. Stewart, eds. *Urban Governance and Democracy: Leadership and Community Involvement*. New York: Routledge: pp. 190–215.

5 More on this in Katalin Pallai and John P. Driscoll (2006) “The Challenge of Strategic Planning in South East Europe.” Paper prepared for the Regional Conference of LGI/OSI, Antalya. Available online: <http://www.pallai.hu>.

Instead of working with the community and agreeing on common goals and priorities for a better future, the usual question local leaders formulate is brutally simple: “Do we want more money for investments in our services?” This question might sound logical in the framework of a technocratic managerial leadership. However, on the basis of a wider world view, it is misleading, as more money does not necessarily mean more local prosperity in the long run. More subsidies can also become the source of failure. If the investments are not for real priorities, they are only short-term gains for the politician who cuts the ribbon at the opening ceremony. The local contribution to the investment cost and the operating costs are financial liabilities to the community. They entail expenses that could be disbursed on real needs and priorities, if the stakeholders had the opportunity to agree upon real priorities in a participatory strategy process.

Besides its narrow concept of service delivery, there is another problem with the surviving tradition of technocratic, transactional leadership: its perception of stakeholders is often severely limited and it often leads to partisan politics⁶ and exclusion.

Many local leaders do not conceive themselves as the “leaders of the place,”⁷ i.e., leaders responsible for all members of the community. Transactional leaders can neglect huge groups, because they do not count benefits as “transactions.” The concepts of community cohesion and sustainable development hardly fit within this mental framework. It is my sad experience that most leaders of our region can easily imagine development while leaving large groups behind, excluded from opportunities. As an illustration, I tell an anecdote from one of my recent executive city leadership and strategy trainings. After five days of cases, debates, and exercises on strategy drafting and participation, we worked on the case of a local government in an area where, in addition to traditional and prosperous population groups, approximately 25 percent of the population was poor, and often deprived of opportunity. During the fifth day a senior local decision-maker finally formulated the question that was tacitly underlying long debates on participation during the previous days: “Should we really involve the poor (poor large families and pensioners) and deprived (Roma) groups in the local strategy process, when they can hardly add anything?” This blunt reality—still a question for leading decision-makers whether they can carry out local strategies exclusively for the affluent—made me shiver. At the same time, I was happy that during the five previous days we had built such an air of

trust that the question finally could be asked, and thus subsequently openly discussed.

All the points above aim to show that beneath the surface survives a winner-take-all mentality, and actual incentives often reinforce old approaches of project-based, “transaction politics.” They reinforce a narrow concept of managerial leadership in local governments and work against the evolution of community leadership and a governance-type role for local governments. They divert attention from democratic dialog, community building, and sustainable development. As long as transactional leadership is the prevalent culture, random cases of participatory processes may be reported, but they hardly become the rule, as within the system of transactions stakeholder participation remains an unnecessary cost or a liability.

The source of the paradox, or the concept that has not yet been grasped

I have one explanation for the paradox: although leaders can easily repeat the arguments they heard about stakeholder participation, they have not understood the underlying concepts. The foundations are missing: what could local autonomy offer, what are the principles of an open society, what does inclusion, integration, sustainable social peace, or community leadership mean?

Local independence should mean that communities work on their own future, on what direction they want to go and how. They can decide their strategy to improve the life of the community, and if community members agree, then they will contribute to the extent they can. This is an effort with a long-term horizon. It is an effort that necessarily entails communication, and participation in the decision-making—a democratic dialog. Stakeholder

6 Partisan politics here is used for the politics that is focused on the representation of the interests of own supporters. It will later be contrasted with “resolver politics” whose aim is to resolve conflicts through mutual empowerment. For more on these types of governance strategies see A. Scott Bollens (2002) “Managing Urban Ethnic Conflict.” In: Robin Hambleton, Hank V. Savitch, and Murray Stewart, eds., *Globalism and Local Democracy: Challenge and Change in Europe and North America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan: pp. 108–124.

7 For more on leadership of place, see Leadership Center for Local Government (2006) “The Politics of Place.” London: LCLG.

mobilization along common goals and strategies can be achieved in open societies where all opinions are valued. Where, instead of the short-term barter games of transactional leaders, the new leaders are committed to facilitating the societal learning and agreement processes in order to resolve conflicts of values, aspirations, and interests. Such processes need community leaders who perceive themselves as transformational leaders⁸ or resolvers⁹—a leadership approach that undertakes the long journey of convening meetings, integrating all the stakeholders, and working on bonding instead of bartering. For such leaders, stakeholder participation in the policy process is intrinsic and unavoidable.

What can urge leaders to shift from transactional, partisan leadership to transformational community leadership? It seems that the actual incentives produced by the context do not push them in this direction. Then, only their own personal values and convictions could.

For seriously embarking on participation, one must embrace the basic values of an open society and sustainable development. A belief in a society that is inclusive, pluralistic, and open to alternative points of view, and that recognizes the benefits of diversity, is the basis for dialog that can facilitate the finding of just solutions.

What could be done?

First, we have to face reality: in our region important dimensions of leadership have not widely changed during the last decade. A transactional local leader whose thinking still skews toward subsidy maximization can easily agree to make a short, one-shot participatory project but will likely misunderstand the essence and will not maintain or institutionalize the mechanism.

If we believe in the value of local democracy, democratic dialog, and participation, we must work on leaders to understand what open society and modern community leadership means. Help them to understand transformational community leadership. Leaders must learn more than the first lesson of listing borrowed reasons for participation. They should understand open society, democratic dialog, and implement it through

an institutional framework that can accommodate substantial community involvement and manage participatory mechanisms. If a shift to a new type of political leadership is ever to happen in our region, it will first happen in local governance where issues and politicians are the closest to citizens.

What could a philanthropic organization committed to the cause of open society do to help make this happen?

It should attempt to change more and more leaders' views. At this stage, I think, advocacy of the open society agenda should mean the translation of its principles to practical consequences and field work. To the dissemination of mainstream intergovernmental and local management mechanisms, we should add analysis of how these tools impact inclusion and deprivation, and whether they contribute to or work against the open society agenda if applied in various contexts. Research has shown that some generally acceptable management tools can have a perverse impact if applied in certain contexts.

A philanthropic organization committed to an open society could also disseminate skills and tools in order to implement these values more effectively, and offer examples, through demonstration projects and their dissemination.

The good news is that LGI has been actively doing this in many of its projects. The underlying concept of both the urban management courses and the Managing Multiethnic Communities Program's trainings offered by LGI is a policy process that encourages public dialog and inclusive community thinking in order to improve the work of local government and build trust in public action. During LGI training courses, we have been working hard on encouraging deeper understanding, by offering forums for discussion and applicable tools and examples to implement the values we are convinced of.

Can this produce change?

I think it can, and I support this statement with an anecdote: Recently I met the vice-mayor of a leading Hungarian city who is an alumnus of one of my private city leadership courses. "It looks like I am deeply 'infected' by the values and ideas you offered," he told me jokingly. "But I am also in trouble since I came home, because I initiate things others do not yet understand." His "trouble" is our success. And I hope that he and other alumni will "spread the infection" to still others, creating a multiplier effect that disseminates our agenda to community leaders and civil societies everywhere.

8 For more on transformational leadership see Burns (1978) and Hambleton (2005); *op cit*.

9 On resolver leadership strategy see Bollens (2002); *op cit*.

LGI Activities

Participatory Planning Is the Worst Form of Planning—Except for All the Others

Scott Abrams

Former United States President Woodrow Wilson once famously quipped, “I not only use all the brains that I have, but all that I can borrow.” As established and burgeoning democracies know very well, public *participation* in public affairs can be cumbersome, time-consuming, and messy. But all things considered, it’s that critical input from the public—whether through elections, planning, or oversight—that best ensures the will of the people is taken into account, that government is well informed about decisions it takes, and that certain guarantees of transparency and accountability are ensured. This is true at both the national and local levels of government, and constitutes the reigning philosophy and approach LGI has taken when supporting municipalities in Albania, Kosovo, Mongolia, Serbia, and elsewhere in their efforts to improve their economic and social infrastructures.

Over the past five years, often in partnership with other donors, LGI has sponsored the developmental strategic planning of municipalities in the above countries through its program called “Developing Economies Locally Through Action and Alliance” or DELTA. The aim is to produce a detailed and prioritized set of actions and interventions the government will undertake over the subsequent years to build its physical infrastructure (e.g., roads, ports, industrial parks) and human capital (e.g., education, training, improved processes). In principle, the respective municipal governments are

acting as elected agents, on behalf of their principles, the populace—meaning there are usually no laws mandating public involvement in the decision-making of the government. But in order to be a beneficiary of LGI’s support, governments have had to compete against each another and one of the paramount considerations is their willingness to engage the public.

By the “public” we mean stakeholders from: (1) the private sector, who need government to facilitate their development and expansion through favorable and constructive policies; (2) civil society organizations and community groups, who are usually organized around important issues of public concern, such as minority rights, environmental degradation, and child welfare; and (3) the general public who often can contribute by suggesting innovative ideas, highlighting problematic intentions, and calling attention to governmental favoritism and transgression.

An interesting example of the dividends that can be attributed to inclusive planning has been in the Albanian city of Durrës. There, large segments of the above-mentioned groups contributed to the development plan that the city approved in 2005. But when the political tide changed the following year and the opposition came into power, the 18 months of planning that the city had undertaken did not go to waste, because ownership of the plan rested with the community, not the former political

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party. Moreover, when the new mayor pressed for a surprising set of pet projects, they were largely rejected *by his own party*, because they were not included in the overall plan that the *opposition* had stewarded through! This a far cry from a few months earlier when in a seminar of Albanian deputy mayors and finance officers the question was posed as to whether their respective mayors ever reached out to the private sector to enquire what the local government can best do to support them. After a long silence in the room one brave deputy mayor raised his hand and diffidently asked, “Do you mean, do they check on their own businesses?”

With LGI’s support the City of Belgrade recently completed its draft development plan with the broad participation of civil society. Before putting the city stamp on it and sending it off to the publication house—as many cities in this region might do—the progressive Acting Mayor called for 1,000 copies of the draft to be distributed to citizens and NGOs for comment; for 17 public hearings to take place, one in each Belgrade municipality; for the draft to be uploaded to the city’s website with a means for citizens to comment; and for broad media coverage and debate.

Participation in planning can also translate into decidedly improved success when it comes to implementation. Many donors have traditionally supported strategic planning through a process whereby they paid for a few technical experts—usually foreigners—to interview local stakeholders and then write the development plan for the city. Many underpaid government officials

in Eastern Europe and the Balkans probably favor this approach, because doing the work themselves would constitute a great investment in time and learning, with minimal—if any—compensation. When the locals take this endeavor upon themselves—with training and technical support from groups like LGI—the results may look less “professional” on paper but are more likely to accurately reflect local realities. And those who worked on the plan are more likely to be committed to its execution. Additionally, the partnerships initiated between government, businesses, and civil society through the planning phase often continue well into the implementation phase, and include public-private partnerships to build and finance infrastructure, to improve social services, and to streamline and make less corrupt governmental processes.

A recent evaluation of LGI’s DELTA program by an independent consultant found that the most important lasting effect of the program was the way in which DELTA “graduates” continued to do “business” in a participatory manner long after the methodology had been transferred to them for the specific purpose of generating local economic development plans. On a recent trip to southern Albania to check the planning efforts of a city there, one of the problems associated with too much participation manifested itself directly, though. Not enough chairs in the town hall for all those wishing to contribute. As noted, too much participation can get messy.

The Managing Multiethnic Communities Program and Public Participation

Meghan Simpson

The Managing Multiethnic Communities Program of LGI approaches public participation in local decision-making from the angle of “the public” as a space for diverse groups who are differently positioned to the state and who are in constant implicit or explicit dialog with the state to secure their rights and to receive their due recognition.

Across the globe, states are challenged to meet the needs of heterogeneous populations. Because of inequalities, deeply embedded in political processes and structures, certain groups—like ethnic and linguistic minorities—are often overlooked when it comes to engaging the public. MMCP holds that good governance necessitates a proactive approach, and that public officials must actively reach out to disenfranchised groups. Otherwise, inequalities can persist—if not worsen. In turn, socio-economic gaps can widen, fomenting instability and even conflict. These dynamics are felt most pressingly at the local level, where citizens frequently engage with public institutions and authorities.

On the one hand, many public officials are ill-equipped to address diversity effectively; on the other hand, it is often the case that disenfranchised groups are accused of passivity or even ambivalence in terms of their public participation, thus weakening calls for more open, inclusive governance. Minority and other disenfranchised groups might not engage in local decision-making because they lack allies within the government, and see no promise of response. Or, they might be challenged by the lack of access to the state because of myriad obstacles involving language, economic constraints, or physical ghettoization and isolation.

In some cases, minority groups have been involved in decision-making through tokenistic positions in public institutions or through irregular consultancy events. Typically, this type of “participation” generates neither trust nor mutual understanding, and it certainly does not establish a level playing field that spans the public space. Truly open, inclusive governance requires special and specific efforts to engage certain groups, in ways that show a serious and long-term commitment from those in power. Further, minority groups must be involved in such a way that they not only respond to public officials, but also play a prominent role in defining their needs and appropriate strategies to address them. The need for this type of participation is true for international assistance agencies and NGOs as well, in their work to assist both policymakers and citizens in achieving better governance in ongoing reform processes.

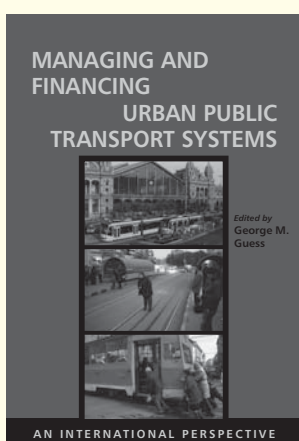
To improve key stakeholders’ responsiveness toward diverse communities, MMCP advocates a multipronged approach. First, awareness-raising is needed, such as trainings or public relations campaigns, to shed light on the relationship between social heterogeneity and governance at the local level. Second, public officials must be equipped with the proper tools, skills, and “know-how” to address diversity effectively. Third, public participation requires sustainable mechanisms that involve citizens—not as a homogenous mass, but as a complex whole of diverse groups and individuals, working toward a “common good.” Certainly, there is no “one-size-fits-all” strategy to engaging diverse groups. Thus, MMCP further emphasizes the need for more policy-oriented research and analysis of relations among diverse groups, within different interethnic, socio-economic, state, and geopolitical contexts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meghan Simpson is an associate researcher at LGI. Her interests are primarily ethnic and gender issues in Central Asia.

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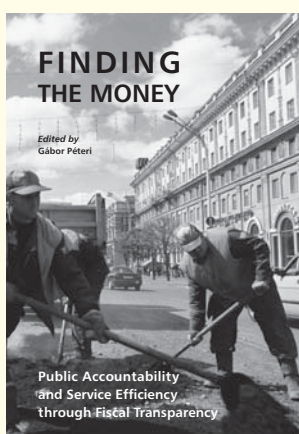


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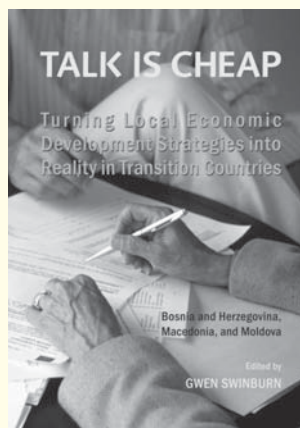
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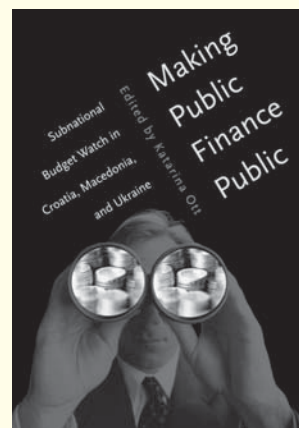


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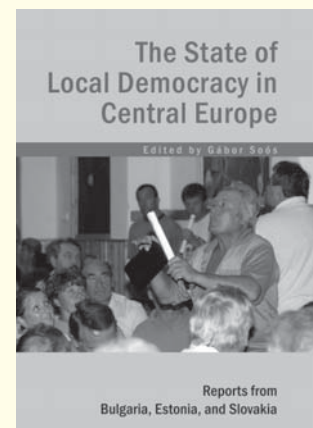


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A New Initiative

Making the Most of EU Funds for the Roma

The Open Society Institute, as a partner in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, has initiated a complex new initiative entitled “Making the Most of EU Funds for the Roma.” With several years of experience in support for Roma inclusion through its Managing Multiethnic Communities Program, LGI is playing a lead role in this initiative.

Several years have passed since governments in Central and Eastern Europe committed to the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Since then, it has become clear that little progress had been made toward eliminating discrimination and supporting the meaningful inclusion of Roma. Monitoring reports show that governments and other stakeholders have not cooperated either effectively or efficiently to carry out their commitments towards the Roma Decade, and major sources of funding have yet to “trickle down” to ideal candidates.

In cooperation with its network of partners and institutions, OSI will contribute to making central governments more responsive and effective in adhering to their Decade commitments. The initiative aims to maximize the use of available resources and funds by governments in the region and to help major European Structural and other European Funds “flow” to local governments, civil society, and private sector actors, who have the expertise needed to contribute the social inclusion of the Roma in all aspects of civic life.

Through several interlinked capacity-building and advocacy interventions developed by an OSI-designated Task Force, the initiative will address Roma inclusion as a social goal on its own, and also as part of broader areas such as good governance, human rights, and social justice that are conducive to wider societal development. The initiative aims to strengthen Roma inclusion as a high priority on regional and European political agendas, and to promote Roma expertise and involvement in different phases of project development and implementation. Interventions will work across all sectors, supporting coalitions of civic and governmental actors and financial institutions, and assisting them to reach a common understanding of social inclusion and concrete, mutually-beneficial modes of cooperation. In keeping with the vision of the Decade, the initiative will define, promote, and scale up pilot initiatives that have made measurable impacts on Roma inclusion, drawing on the lessons from projects of the Open Society Institute, the Roma Education Fund, the European Union, the United Nations Development Program, and others.

The first major activity of the initiative was launched in March 2008, with the launching of the Project Generation Facility. Through this Facility, OSI will enable partner organizations in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, selected through a tender, in their work to assist potential beneficiaries of projects for the Roma communities. This assistance includes: generating project ideas; drafting projects; and receiving financial assistance from EU Funds.

For more about this initiative, visit: <http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?id=2000>.