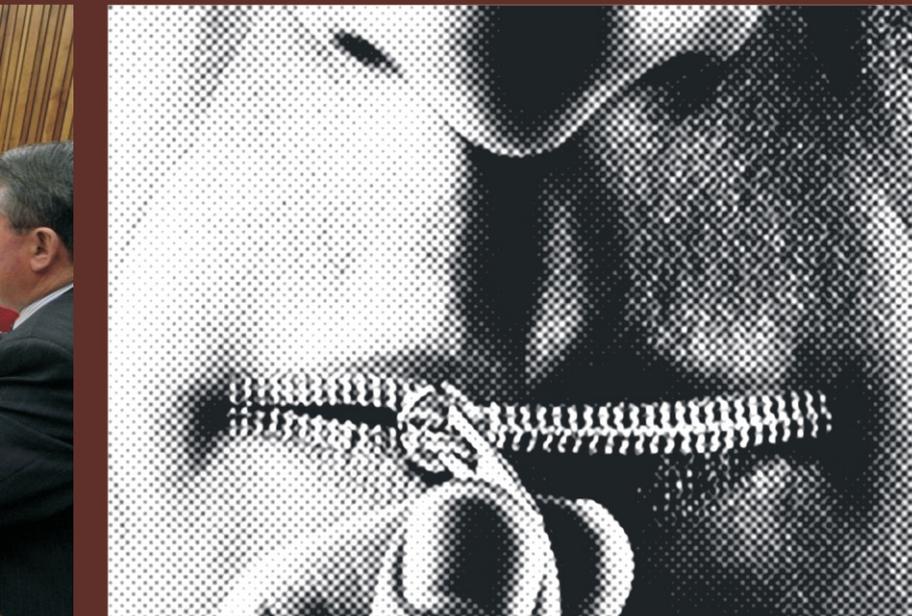




PARTNERSHIP - RHETORIC OR REALITY?

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- country studies -

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Partnership - Rhetoric or Reality?

Country studies

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A rationale for the Project

The context of democratization in the whole Balkans has been one of a challenge: the wars and the tasks of relief and reconstruction, reforms and the goals of opening democratic space and fighting authoritarian tendencies, economic and social transformation, fight against corruption, delivering good services to people, decreasing confidence of citizens in the young central and local governments, disappointment, migration, social exclusion, and the list could continue.

Also Romania did not stand apart as a distinct case for quite a long time, still lagging in many areas alike the other countries in the region.

All partners involved based on previous and current experience and backed up by firm studies, agreed that an outstanding issue that was identified as urgently to be given attention is **the inconsistency of partnership in between NGOs and local governments due to the lack local strategies to address collaborative structural approaches with focus on the structure, values, impact and the external environment of partnerships.**

The core theme of the project *Partnership- rhetoric or reality* lies in the greatest variation in the way the partnerships occur throughout the countries involved in the project, in the case of *horizontal axis* - the involvement of NGOs in the run up of the local affairs and local governance.

Nevertheless, in some countries (Romania, Croatia), the development of appropriate legal and fiscal environments for the functioning and participation of NGOs in local affairs and local governance has been rather advanced; still, problems occur in real life situations when there is a wide gap particularly in between *de facto and de jure* involvement of civil society organizations (NGOs). Local governments are paying lip-service to the relationship with the NGOs; partnerships remain at the stage of ticked actions, sometimes required by external donors, sometimes giving the willingness of politicians to comply with requirements for further integration of the country in the International Organizations.

Partnerships are mostly supply driven and do not reflect the local collective demand of the community. As a consequence, partnerships are too much inclined to lean on the efficiency side, targeting outputs at the cots of outcomes that the whole community will benefit in a long terms perspective. Hence, once a joint project is completed, the relationship in between local governments and NGOs does not spur into a follow up. That has led indirectly to another downside that is the fragmentation of partnership. The mainstream of short-term project-based partnership through NGOs and local governments has resulted in too many one-off interventions of limited duration that often overlap and are uncoordinated. No local strategy has been created on the partnership in between NGOs and local governments that may fill in the gap of sometimes vague, non-explicit national legislation.

There has been feeble indigenous demand for the participation of NGOs in the local affairs and governance for various reasons, for instance, not enough trust into the 3rd sector from the governmental side, lack of cohesiveness amongst NGOs to speak with one voice. Still, in some regions, NGOs have managed to advance the collaboration agenda and consolidation of well-structured relationships with the local governments, building up strong coalitions that proved to have a positive impact on local development and democratization.

Therefore, we strongly reckon that at the local level the efforts to move further the public debate around the role NGOs can play in local governance and that can be advanced through creating synergies in between a wide plethora of actors (citizens, academia, NGOs, local public administration, etc.) both at the local and regional level, recognizing the commonality of cross-cutting issues such as the current one.

As there have been critical historical junctures in all countries part of the project, the process of democratization is still in its infancy and needs to be deepened; moreover, there have been ongoing processes of decentralization, devolution and re-definition of territories triggering the dispersion of prime local identities, diffusion of power and resources down to the local communities.

As a consequence, there has been a widening gap in between citizens and local governments being given the lack of identity, ownership and participation in the local governance. Thus, as citizens prove lack of interest in local affairs and governance, there is a high risk that democracy will be constrained to groups of citizens lacking legitimacy of a large majority leading implicitly to an increased democratic deficit and the emergence of autocracies.

Again, there are positive examples in the region that thanks to the inclusion of NGOs, as engine to gauge citizens' interests, a redefinition on new societal identity at the local level helped the build up of institutional networks and social norms indispensable for the learning and adaptation process imposed by the geopolitics in the region, boosted by the catalyzing role of NGOs, increasingly viewed as a promising approach to improve participatory democracy and local governance performance.

Hereby, we need to express our gratitude and appreciation to our donors **Fundatia SOROS Romania and the Balkan Trust for Democracy- a Project of the German Marshal Fund**, who made a remarkable contribution to the project success.

Florin Pasatoiu,
Project coordinator



IN- COUNTRY REPORT MACEDONIA

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Introduction

The Study “Partnership – rhetoric or reality?” aims to present the main findings of the research on partnership of the local government and NGOs in Veles community, Central Macedonia. It presents an analysis of different partnership operations at the different stages in local affairs and local governance as well as highlighting areas that need to be improved with a view on explaining the diversity of partnership forms and roles played by NGOs.

The study also aims to identify and draw together general factors impacting on the scope and role of NGOs in local affairs and local governance in Veles.

As it was a participatory based research, the research had been conducted in the period from August till October 2008. Research entails the combination of the in-house techniques, like documentation, analyzing official documents, questionnaire dissemination, with action at the grass roots levels, such as focus groups and interviewing with local stakeholders. Questionnaires are distributed to stakeholders at the lowest possible administrative levels.

There were 2 focus groups: representatives of the NGOs and representatives of the different departments in the local government.

The main focus of this study was on NGOs more than on local government. The purpose of this writing was not to put NGOs forward as the one and only appropriate social service provider. The purpose was to set it as one of the most important (beside family, commercial and public organizations). This led us to the hypothesis that a partnership between those who design the rules of the society and those who carry them out should be related in a certain way, otherwise we would come across a less harmonious society.

The whole purpose was not so much to prescribe but more to give an overview of the partnership between NGOs and local government in Veles. At moments, it can be seen as too descriptive but in order to make ourselves clear, it was necessary.

Throughout the whole text we already tried to justify the methodology used. The main problem we came across was the lack of literature on the topic of partnership between NGOs and local government. That is why we had to patch our study with information from more general literature.

Background of the “partnership principle”

The concept of civil society development has been the one on which most of countries have based their future development. The non-governmental sector in the FY Republic of Macedonia can represent an important instrument in the democratization and pluralization of relations within the Macedonian society and in supporting the processes of participation and spreading individual possibilities and individuals' free choices – simply put, an instrument for building “capacities” in terms of civil society development.

This assessment is supported by the knowledge on civil society role as a catalyst of democratic changes within contemporary societies.

In Macedonia, throughout the transition process, the process of transforming citizens from traditional state service clients to citizens with a considerable degree of autonomy has proven to be a very difficult one. The highly centralized state and the unfavorable economic development have largely contributed to it, thus conditioning the existence of citizens over dramatic distortion in social security.

1. Legal structure and legislative process – central level

a. Constitution

Basic Rights and Obligations:

- Right of Free Assembly
- Right of Association
- Right of Petition
- Right to Healthy Environment
- Right of Expression
- Right of Information
- Government Relationship with Citizens

Among the fundamental rights of the constitutional order, for partnership between NGOs and local government, the right to association is the most important. In accordance with this right, citizens are guaranteed freedom of association to exercise and protect their political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and creeds. Citizens may freely establish associations of citizens, join them or resign from them.

Concerning the powers of local self-government, the Constitution provides that in such units, citizens directly and through representatives participate in decision-making on issues of local relevance.

The Constitution includes a general provision that citizens directly and indirectly participate through units of local government in deciding questions of local importance.

b. Parliamentary and Governmental Practice

Parliament establishes Parliamentary commissions with specific competences, including the drafting of laws on particular subjects. In addition to Members of Parliament, these commissions include experts from outside the Parliament. The expert bodies assembled may include representatives of non-governmental organizations. The Parliament has a special office responsible for cooperation with NGOs.

Most of the actual drafting of laws is done by the Government. The applicable governmental authority charged with drafting a law develops a working text which is submitted to various experts for their comments. During the consultation and commenting process the responsible Ministry may, but is not required to, include members of the public. Organizations whose comments are solicited may include government-related institutes, NGOs, representatives of the business community, and others. The Government has a special department responsible for cooperation with NGOs.

c. Law on Citizen Associations and Foundations

This basic Law is in support of conditions which encourage the formation of NGOs. The fact is that the current profile, i.e. the structure of NGOs in Macedonia, indicates the existence of a wide scope of different and relatively solid, although not numerous, citizen associations creating the necessary conditions for a relatively “soft” transition, or for partial externalization of public sector services to NGOs.

Also, this basic Law provides that in local governments decision-making processes NGOs have power to participate on issues of local relevance particularly in the fields of urban planning, communal activities, culture, sport, social security and child-care, preschool education, primary and secondary education, basic health care and other fields determined by Law.

In accordance with this Law we can say that the legal environment is supportive of civil society and the Law is being administered fairly across sectors.

2. Legal structure and legislative processes – local level

On the local level the most important are these laws:

- ◇ Law on Local Self-Government (2001)
- ◇ Law on Territorial Organization (2001)
- ◇ Law on Financing the Local Self-Government Units (2004)

Articles of the laws on local level include a general provision that citizens directly and indirectly participate through units of local government in deciding questions of local importance. Also, these laws allow citizens to join together and form self-governing local bodies “to further their common interests”. From the text of the local law the relationship between such bodies and local and municipal governments is not clear.

Local authorities are expected to have slightly increased power over decision making affecting their jurisdiction as a result of current laws. Under the present system, local governments have inherent powers, and exercise authority over matters delegated to them by the central government.

The following elements are particularly taken into consideration when analyzing the legal structure and legislative process on local level:

- ◇ NGOs have contacts with different departments in local authority – usually concerning different issues.
- ◇ Local authority is free in designing the form of relations.
- ◇ Relations between organizations are more “ad hoc” and whenever there is interest they come together.
- ◇ At the local level there is no regulation for cooperation.
- ◇ Most of the municipalities have not built a model of formal cooperation. Some of the formal collaboration is realized through departments or commissions for cooperation, info centers or part time employed persons responsible for cooperation with NGOs.
- ◇ Capital city Skopje has a Strategy for cooperation with NGOs.

Purposes of partnership

The partnership may create favorable societal conditions for changing citizens' status position. Nevertheless, there are numerous factors from which these favorable societal changes will result in the introduction of a civil society where the citizen will have considerable degree of autonomy.

The evolution of the partnership process after Macedonia gained independence would conditionally be divided into three periods:

The first period (1991-1995) is the period of centralization when, de facto, the only competences left to the local self-government units were the ones falling under communal sphere. In this period there was no element of relations and partnership.

The Law on Local Self-Government was adopted in 1995, and the new Law on Territorial Organization was adopted in 1996. The reform process directed toward decentralization was on its path to becoming reality. In this period (1998), the Law on Citizen Associations and Foundations was adopted.

The period after 2001 till today is the period during which the new Law on Local Self-Government and the new Law on Territorial Organization were adopted until the start of the 2001 crisis, and now it is under additional pressure from the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

In related literature, the need for partnership is linked with the improvement of efficiency in securing public services, namely, partnership enables better realization of projects due to better knowledge of local circumstances, i.e. when decisions are made on local level; funds are allocated where they must be handed.

Also, partnership can encourage local government and NGOs to use funds more efficiently so as to use the collected savings for other purposes.

Finally, local government and NGOs can define procedures and employ personnel in a manner in which they will suit local circumstances and needs, without having to rely on central rules and organs which usually are rigid and inappropriate for local conditions.

Macedonia has a rich experience with partnership between local government and NGOs, since the period after the Second World War; it has walked the path toward a completely decentralized system with an extraordinarily high level of autonomy.

Later, in the period after independence, major changes were undertaken regarding the relations between the local and central governments resulting in the discontinuation of the majority of competences previously held by municipalities. In this manner the partnership was transposed from one extreme to the other.

In that sense, the adoption of the Law on Financing the Local Self-Government Units, at the beginning of September 2004, represents a huge step forward in the regulation of this area.

In principle, partnerships should contribute to the increase in efficiency of public services at the local level, where positive effects should derive from several reasons: better knowledge of local conditions, more successful identification of needs and allocation of resources, more efficient performance of functions, increasing the degree of accountability towards citizens, etc.

Finally, as it has been shown by several researches, the improved delivery of public services would – to a large degree – depend on several conditions, starting from institutional and human capacity available in the local self-government units and NGOs.

This implies creation and implementation of local measures and instruments focused on local development, primarily relating to:

- ◇ structural priorities of local development, and local-level real sector support;
- ◇ focusing on and creation of local measures to encourage, support, and develop projects with economic comparative advantage, as it is best done by a government which is closer to citizens;
- ◇ promotion of the partnership principle with local NGOs partner involvement, which will also include local measures and instruments;
- ◇ creation and development of a local network of institutions and local agencies for information; and
- ◇ series of other measures to encourage local development.

The advantages of partnership are evident, as it primarily enables adjustment to the local preference and priority.

A smaller community like Veles, finds it easier to provide the necessary quantity and variety of public goods for its citizens. It encourages competition among NGOs and public services, and gives its citizens the possibility of a more efficient monitoring of local governments performance, which, in turn, provides for innovations in locally supplied goods and more efficient and high-quality selection of citizens' preferences.

Factors which influence partnership arrangements

When looking for an answer to the question of the factors which influence partnership arrangements, it is very important to determine the model of relations between NGOs and local government, which contextualize this concept to a great extent. In the course of it, it is important to apply the typology of their mutual relations, shaped on the basis of the following dimensions:

- ◇ closeness and distance between the local government and NGOs (in terms of communications and contacts) and
- ◇ mutual dependence and independence (in terms of financing and control).

The typology of partnership between local government and NGOs which are analyzed in this study is as follows:

a) local government dominant model

In this model local government plays the dominant role in both the financing and delivery of human services. It fundamentally involves the local government as both the principal provider of welfare services using the tax system to raise funds, and local government employees to deliver needed services.

b) NGOs dominant model

Here the NGOs play the dominant role in both financing and delivery services. This model prevails where opposition to local government involvement in social welfare provision is strong either for ideological or sectorial reasons.

c) dual model

In this model, financing and delivery of human services are in some sense shared between local government and the NGOs which can be either seen as a supplement or as a complement. In the former case, the organisations forming the NGOs are providing the same kind of services whereas in the latter they complement the supplies of the local government by filling needs not met by local government activity. Both are relatively autonomous systems of services finance and delivery.

d) collaborative model

The main feature of this model is that they work together rather than separately. Typically this takes the form of local government providing the finance and the NGOs actually delivering the services (Gidron, Kramer and Salamon, 1992, p.17-19).

The last two models are the ones that are most interesting for our study because they contain the element of relations. There are two dimensions considered especially important in a partnership between NGOs and local government. The first dimension relates to how close NGOs are to the local government with respect to scope of frequency and easiness of communication and contact. NGOs can either be near or distant in terms of communications and contacts. The second dimension relates to the independence of NGOs from local government in terms of financing and control. In this case NGOs can either be independent or dependent (Kuhnle&Selle,1992).

The local government – NGOs partnership is the topic that has yet not been analysed to greater extent in Macedonian society. That was the reason why we presented a combination of different factors which influence partnership arrangements. These factors were decisive when we had to establish what kind of model of partnership we have in Veles. These factors were involved in all levels of research.

The factors which influence partnership arrangements are the following:

1. Programs for supporting NGOs and different forms of financing.
2. Independence of NGOs finances.
3. Contacts of NGOs which they have with different departments in local authority.
4. Designing the form of relations.
5. Creation of local measures to encourage, support, and develop projects with NGOs.
6. The motivation to establish a sound relation with local authorities and community.
7. Mayor's role in all areas of relation.
8. Analyzing the main monitoring and control bodies.
9. The incidence of bureaucratic procedures.
10. Levels of control.
11. Local policy context and the needs of the community.
12. Research, innovation and communication of sorts.
13. Dynamics and tradition/history of the relations.
14. Implementation processes of the local regulatory framework.
15. Importance of human factor.
16. Request for contacts.
17. Promotion of the partnership principle with local NGOs and partner involvement, which also includes local measures and instruments.
18. Structural priorities of local development, and local-level real sector support.
19. Creation and development of a local network of institutions and local agencies for information.

MAIN FINDINGS

Regarding the data material given by the NGOs and local authority and by analyzing questionnaires, focus groups debates and interviews, we acknowledged the following forms of relations between local government and NGOs in Veles:

1. In terms of finances and control, NGOs are not very dependent on local government and this strength determines all other aspects of relations – contacts and communications. Local government and NGOs are more or less independent and in between near and distant in terms of communications and contacts.
2. Generally speaking, the local government and NGOs partnerships are dynamic and various in form, having a relatively long tradition.
3. We acknowledged big gaps in the implementation process of the Program for supporting NGOs on local level. This fact is plays the major hindering element in the management and other works of the NGOs and local government.
4. Importance of human factor. It was very obvious that the bigger the interest in the NGOs and local government to achieve something, more relations would ensue (not necessary positive in terms of progress in the partnership – meaning that there are also clashing interest). Personal acquaintance with parties responsible plays an important element in the nature of these relations.
5. Contacts are established on request of either local government (local authority more or less) or NGOs. But we can say that initiative mainly comes from NGOs.

Explanation of the findings

In the following section we will try to explain the earlier mentioned findings not in the same system of reference, but in a more combined manner.

In Veles most of the financing comes from different sources and most of it is granted according to contracts. Financing is not the initial step for contacts. We can say that NGOs are often in dependant relationship with one statutory authority or another for funding. If the NGOs were not getting money from local authority, this would not minimize their contacts. NGOs nevertheless still claim their independence and state that they choose the services themselves but as we analyze the relation further we can see that the picture is not at all clear.

The Program for supporting NGOs has first of all designed different forms of financing and secondly made not only the Department responsible for achievement of the Program. This two facts add to the colourful nature of partnership. NGOs have contacts with different departments in local public authority – usually concerning different issues.

NGOs from social care were given the money on the basis of a programme – meaning that local government purchases the services from them. The other organization was given a yearly grant from central government. The money the organizations were given was of course not sufficient but in times of scarce resources, the organizations take whatever they can even if it costs them their independence.

One organization (the one on the basis of a contract) complained that the contacts could have been better and that local authority does not co-operate the way the NGOs would have wanted. The other organization did not have much to say on the topic of relations but has added that they have frequent contacts with the local authority. It is important to add that the influence upon the policies for a specific area organizations work in (like caring for the physically or mentally-challenged or for the elderly) is much bigger in Veles. Local government have only one person who is dealing with the issue.

Representation of the “client needs” is second to Mayor's concerns of NGOs in Veles. Groups of interests represent certain segments of the population and act as advocates for their needs. Many times, NGOs are not so much successful in convincing the local authority that the needs of quality or services they see as “appropriate” are the ones local authorities should be pursuing.

The situation is not so confuse, because the moment an NGOs applies for money at the local authority, it is not bound to the rules local authority designs. It does not happen in many cases that the local authority representatives report that “organizations like to bite the hand that is feeding them”. This means that the NGOs are not running against local authority beliefs and “standards”.

Local authorities in Veles are free in designing the form of relations, the amount of money that should be given for services with some instructions for its partition and distribution. Local authority sees itself as the main regulative body and at the same time not the main services provider. Sometimes they have not the clearest vision of what is needed.

Relation between the NGOs and local government should be defined so that NGOs are made aware of how they are viewed by the local authorities and what is expected of them.

Services priority is set by the local authority and they purchase and finance whatever they think is necessary. This hinders the organization in devising innovation, because new services minimize the chances of getting funded.

In Veles the local authority provides minimum grants to organizations and expects much from them in return.

Relations between NGOs and local government are more “ad hoc” – whenever there is interest they come together. As we have pointed out previously, contacts are made on request of NGOs. Otherwise, NGOs work on their own.

Local authorities show interest in the work of NGOs – as far as the Community of Veles is concerned.

There is only one employed person responsible for the area of NGOs. From the interview we had with the person responsible for this area we had the feeling that the local authority has no power at all (because of central government ingerence). This has impact on the nature of local government NGOs relations in Veles.

We have acknowledged that NGOs at the local level have enough influence upon Mayor policies in the area connected with the general issues of the NGOs and the specific policies that concern the area they are working in.

The human factor comes as an important element. We had the feeling that personal relations play the most important part in getting things done. This statement is hard to prove, but interviewed persons kept mentioning that if you know somebody at the local authority, relations work better. In one organization in Veles this proved to be a negative element, just because due to the negative connotation of the organization membership they did not have any influential members. This was the organization that had no contacts at all with the local authority. It is on the one hand also important to add that the interest to make the change in this organization was very low, whereas on the other hand, in all other organizations, persons interviewed showed motivation and willingness to make a change.

The motivation to establish a sound relation with the local authority is quite high in Veles. This shows that NGOs are taking these relations seriously and that they want to set down some rules of the game themselves. From the interview we had with the persons from the local government we could say that local authority still plays the major role in all areas of relation. We support this statement with only one argument which lays in the fact that local authority still represents the main control body.

Following the fact that the NGOs are more closely connected with local authority in terms of communications then in financing is leading us to conclusion that the Program for supporting NGOs has brought little changes in the management of the NGOs.

In Veles, the Program for supporting NGOs is a rather new policy and has not been fully implemented. The budgets are subject to change and the picture about the future is not completely clear.

Local authorities sometimes do not know what the needs of local communities really are, there is lack of research and sometimes no communication of this sort with NGOs who are keeping some kind of records for their own use. This could signal a start for the better planning of community care. Local authorities do not yet know what to do with the same NGOs and similarly oriented NGOs are therefore seen more as a burden.

Recommendations

The transfer or externalization of supply for goods and services on local level, is from the public sector to other contractors, especially NGOs. At the same time, the local government maintains its responsibility regarding the financing, coordination and control. The embracing of such a strategy increases local government roles in promoting social welfare without further increasing the bureaucratic apparatus.

Allocation of funds and support of the civil society sector is transparent. In this case, the Program for supporting NGOs must put forward the following key components: services that respond flexibly and sensibly to the needs of individuals; services that allow a range of options for consumers; services that intervene no more than necessary to foster independence and last, but not least, services that concentrate on those with the greatest needs.

It is also very important that the Program for supporting NGOs has to establish a clear procedure and criteria for the allocation of funds for NGOs.

It is necessary to analyze in which areas, NGOs in Veles can develop faster and show greater efficiency at the same time.

These will be a reason for local government indeed supporting these NGOs.

In our opinion, faster development of NGOs can be expected in the following fields:

- ◇ *solving newly-emerging social and other issues to which the local government have not reacted yet or have delayed action (unemployment, various forms of addictions and alienation, environment protection, etc.);*
- ◇ *the protection and exercising of the rights of special population groups (children, youth, physically or mentally-challenged persons, the elderly, etc.);*
- ◇ *the production of goods and services representing alternatives to public production;*
- ◇ *an action-based problem solving strategy within local communities;*
- ◇ *self-help, self-production/self-employment and mutual assistance;*
- ◇ *an experimental and action-based introduction of innovations to programs and services;*
- ◇ *an intermediary financial and “umbrella” organizations offering support to NGOs.*

All those above stated point out to the fact that Veles initiated the development of a new partnership with NGOs. It is understandable, therefore, that we expect fast overcoming of structural weak sides originating from the past.

General conclusions

The current model of partnership between the NGOs and local government in Veles is specific because of a certain separate dependence characterized by the following:

- ◇ a dominance of the local governance, and limitation of NGOs by means of public policy
- ◇ a medium of communications and contacts between the local self government and NGOs
- ◇ a low level of dependency of NGOs from public financing

A model for ideal partnership

The desired relation between the local self government and NGOs can be defined as a relation of “integrated dependency”. This relation can be defined by means of the following elements:

- a low level of control;
- a medium level of citizen association financed by the local self government, and
- a high level of communications and contacts between the local self government and NGOs.

This would mean that the local self government seriously “counts” on NGOs as entities providing public goods and services. On this basis, NGOs would become stronger (in terms of better organization and higher professionalism level), and would open up, leading to public sector re-shaping processes (due to the existence of competition). The effects of this new societal setup will certainly be the introduction of quality in the Veles system of welfare.

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IN- COUNTRY REPORT CROATIA

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Introduction

This paper aims to present the main findings of the research on partnership of the local government and civil society organisations in one community in Croatia. The chosen community is the City of Beli Manastir, a small town situated in the plains of the Eastern Croatia.

The research was a part of the project “Partnership: Rhetoric or Reality?” that was carried out by three organizations and their associates in three countries, namely in Romania and Macedonia along Croatia.

The research had been conducted in the period from April till September, and beside desk review, it consisted of a focus group, a scenario workshop, a number of interviews and a public hearing.

Before concentrating on the findings, it should be stated that the research conducted in Beli Manastir would not have been possible without open and generous help from both the City of Beli Manastir and the civil society organisations from Beli Manastir.

Representatives from both sides were very willing to cooperate, responsive and active throughout the research activities, for which the research team is thankful.

Background of the “partnership principle”

The “partnership principle” for cooperation of government and non-governmental organizations was made possible by the introduction of the civil society in the first place, in the first Croatian Constitution adopted in 1990, in Article 43¹.

Since that time, the legislation regulating the civil society sector and relations of the government, whether that be at national, regional or local level, has been proposed, brought, ammended, adopted and modified a number of times, to a more or less satisfying effect.

The relevant documents fall within two main groups: the strategic documents regulating the relationship of the state and non-governmental organizations, and regulations on institutional framework (such as acts, decisions, bylaws, directives...etc.)

The first group, the strategic documents regulating the relationship of the state and non-governmental organizations, consists of:

1) National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development (July 2006) and Operational Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development (January, 2007)²

The Strategy provides basic guidelines for the goals we seek to achieve by 2011 in order to improve the existing and create a new legal, financial and institutional framework of support for civil society development, and to create an enabling environment for the further development of civil society in the Republic of Croatia. The objective of the Strategy is to create conditions for community development in which citizens and civil society organisations, in synergy with other sectors, actively, equally and responsibly, on the basis of the principles of sustainable development and acting for public benefit, participate in the building of a society of well-being and equal opportunities for all.

(1) The citizens are guaranteed the right of free associatship for purposes of protecting their interests or soliciting for social, economical, political, national, cultural or other beliefs and causes. For this purpose, the citizens may freely form political parties, syndicates and other organisations, join them, or secede. (2)The right of free associatship is limited by prohibition of violent menace for the democratic constitutional order, the independence, unity and the territorial integrity of the Republic of Croatia. ”

(2) The key step following the adoption of this National Strategy was the drawing up of an Operational Implementation Plan for the set objectives, laying down the measures, competent authorities, and timeframes for implementation.

2) **Code of Good Practice, Standards and Benchmarks for the Allocation of Funding for Programmes and Projects of NGOs** (adopted by the Parliament in February 2007)

The Code regulates the basic standards and principles of practice in state administrative bodies and the office of the Government of the Republic of Croatia in the procedure of allocating grants from the state budget funds to organizations for the implementation of their programmes and projects of special interest for the general/public good in the Republic of Croatia. Donating/financing institutions act according to the provisions of this Code, so that available resources would be used efficiently in society and state budget funds used rationally and transparently when allocating funds to organizations for the implementation of projects and programmes.

3) **The Proposal of the Programme of Cooperation between the Croatian Government and the Non-Governmental Non-Profit Sector in Croatia** (January 2000)

The Programme of Cooperation between the Croatian Government and the Non-governmental, Non-profit Sector is based on mutual values of modern democracy and values of citizens', civil initiatives based on social changes, cooperation, solidarity, social justice, transparency, personal power and responsibility, participation in decision-making, respect for personality, self-organization, respect for differences among organizations and continuous education and aimed at creating efficient mechanisms that will further the relations between the Government and the Sector.

The second group of documents is called **Institutional Framework Regulations**, and it includes a number of regulations setting up concrete bodies, competent authorities, communication channels, and very importantly – ways of support for civil society organizations (for the full list see Appendix 1). The documents include regulations such as **Regulation on the Government Office for Cooperation With NGOs, Decision on the Establishment of the Council for Civil Society Development and The Appointment of its Chairperson and Members, Rules of Procedure of the Council for the Development of Civil Society, Act on National Foundation for Civil Society Development, National Programme of the Republic of Croatia for Integration into the European Union 2004**, and others.

The existing legislative framework enabled using a unique approach of the State towards the civil society sector in Croatia, and establishment of what is now called a “**three – pillar system**”, consisted of three different but equally important institutions. The first is **the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs**. It was founded by the Regulation on Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs in 1998 with the aim of performing expert work in the domain of the Croatian Government with regards to creating conditions for cooperation and partnership with non-governmental, non-profit sector, especially with associations in the Republic of Croatia. The Office has a wide scope of activities, from cooperation in creating and proposing new legislative frameworks for the activity of non-governmental, non-profit sector in the Republic of Croatia, monitoring the implementation of the National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development and measures of the Operational Implementation Plan for the Strategy to forming a programme, standards and recommendations for financing the activity of civil society organizations from the state budget and other public funds, as well as pre-accession and structural funds of the European Union. According to the effective Regulation on Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs, the task of the Office is to coordinate the work of ministries, central state offices, Croatian Government offices and state administrative organizations, as well as administrative bodies at local level in connection with monitoring and improving the cooperation with the non-governmental, non-profit sector in the Republic of Croatia. The Office implements projects supporting civil society development funded from the European Commission programmes and stipulated by the Central Finance and Contracting Unit of the Ministry of Finance.

Except for the already initiated projects from the CARDS programme and those planned by PHARE and IPA, the Office shall also be responsible for the implementation of the Community programme *Europe for Citizens*, which will open additional possibilities for financing projects by civil society organizations in Croatia from 2008 onwards. Furthermore, the Office works on improving the standards for financing organizations' programmes from the state budget.

The second body is **the Council for the Development of Civil Society**, an advisory and expert body of the Republic of Croatia whose job is to develop the implementation and efficiency of the Programme of Cooperation between the Croatian Government and Non-governmental Non-profit sector, in the process of implementation of the National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society, development of philanthropy, social capital, partner relations and cooperation among sectors. The Council's³ tasks are continuous monitoring and analyses of public politics, reports from the Croatian Government on the drafted regulations referring to civil society development and organizing the inclusion of civil society organizations into debates, cooperation in planning the priorities of the national programmes for awarding grants from the state budget funds to projects and programmes of civil society organizations, gathering and analysis of annual reports from state administrative bodies on awarded grants and cooperation in programming and establishing priorities in the use of EU pre-accession programmes and funds.

The third body, **the National Foundation for the Civil Society Development**, is a public foundation founded by the Republic of Croatia by a special act passed by the Croatian Parliament on 16 October 2003, founded with the basic aim of promoting and developing the civil society in the Republic of Croatia. In order to fulfil its basic aim, the Foundation offers expert and financial support to programs which encourage the sustainability of the not-for-profit sector, inter-sector cooperation, civil initiatives, philanthropy, voluntary work, and which improve the democratic institutions of society and other programs which fulfil the basic aims of the Foundation. The Foundation cooperates with the public sector (bodies of state administration, units of local and regional self-government and other public institutions), the business sector and not-for-profit sector / civil society organizations.

Local Government and Civil Society Organisations

The partnership principle for the local government and civil society organizations is not exactly the same as for the state level institutions. All three bodies mentioned support the cooperation of the national and local government and civil society organizations and enable operation of the partnership principle providing - besides regulations - guidelines and procedures on one side, and significant financial support on the other. However, the units of local government enjoy autonomy and are independent in decision making for all issues within the scope of their work, which is defined by the Law on Determination of Work in Areas of Self-governed Units and Administration.

Given the fact that the majority of NGOs in Croatia operates on the local level, their funding depends on the resources anticipated for them by the budget of the units of local government and self-administration (counties, City of Zagreb, towns and municipalities). In accordance with Article 23, Paragraph 3 of the Associations Act, priority in state funding is given to those NGOs whose activity parallels the interests of the Republic of Croatia. Funding is appointed to the NGOs by those administrative units under whose authority the activity of the given NGO falls.

The Law on Local Self-Administration and Government does not specifically refer to the possibility of cooperation between NGOs and the bodies of local government. It only mentions the possibility of forming local committees on the suggestion of citizens and their organisations.

(3) *The Council has a Chairman and 23 members including: 10 representatives of competent state administrative bodies and the Croatian Government offices, 10 representatives of non-governmental, non-profit organizations and 3 experts appointed for 3 years without the possibility of re-election*

The local committees represent a form of direct civic participation in deciding affairs that influence their everyday lives. The Statute of each unit of local self-administration allows entrusting citizens and NGOs with performing individual affairs within the self-administrative domain, and separate funds are secured for this in the budget of the municipality or town. For all other forms of cooperation, special regulation applies.

However, there is something that needs to be elaborated upon. According to the custom in Croatia, the same as in many countries of Europe, certain organizations that fall within the definition of civil society sector are local institutions of extreme importance for the life of communities, namely – fire homes, political parties, Red Cross, churches, unions, folklore societies, humanitarian organizations, sport clubs, and others. Their work is regulated through a set of regulations (see Appendix 2). This is extremely important, as the financial support for many of these comes from the state or local department unit budget.

This means that all other organizations that deal with e.g. human rights, ecology or advocacy and policy issues primarily in the domain of the state in so far, are not included in this group of privileged organizations, and they usually do have difficulties and problems raising funds for their existence and work. Unlike sport clubs or arts and crafts organizations, NGOs that deal with e.g. minority rights, or unemployed, or preservation of nature, usually either close down operations after some active period or become, evolving from grassroots initiatives, larger organizations which are advocacy and policy oriented, and thus contribute even more to the communities they belong to.

The span of NGOs that can be supported or even contracted for certain tasks by local government bodies is rather extensive and it covers different fields of life such as:

- 1) Culture - The Law on theatres (NN 61/91, Article 32) anticipates municipal funding for private theatres
- 2) Urban and space planning - The Act on public discussion in the process of forming space planning schemes (NN 101/98, Article 9) postulates that the citizens have access and the right to inspect the space plan as well as the right to offer suggestions and critique. Before the final version of the plan is forwarded to the representative body, the author of the project is obliged to deliver a written explanation to the participants of the public discussion, explaining the reasons for rejection or partial acceptance of their comments, critique and suggestions.
- 3) Protecting the environment - The plan of interventions in environment protection (NN 82/99, subparagraph 8) enables NGOs operating in the county, whose activities include protecting the environment, to be eligible for duty in the Expert Commission for creation of intervention plans.
- 4) Communal service - The Law on Communal service (NN 36/95, 70/97 and 128/99) allows non-profit NGOs, whose portfolio is environment protection, to perform certain public services, such as upkeep of public areas.

In spite of the actions taken to improve the relations, cooperation and administration of the local government and NGOs, there are still issues to be addressed⁴.

For example, only a small number of units of local government and self-administration awards funds on the basis of a public call and with clearly articulated and publicised criteria.

This sort of non-transparency sometimes is met in NGOs as well; their programmes often remain unclearly formulated, thus it becomes difficult to evaluate the results a NGO achieves.

(4) *In the autumn of 1999, the Government's Bureau for Organisations initiated seminars under the name "The models of cooperation between units of local government and self-administration and NGOs" in four of the largest cities in Croatia. The results demonstrated that, in practice, there are numerous shortcomings and issues in both funding and cooperation.*

However, in this particular issue, in a great number of cases NGOs are ahead of the local governments – they have capacity and knowledge needed in their line of work, direct access to the field, information from the field, and usually they have experience in project management as well as in project design, preparation and project proposal writing, which is not often the case with the local government units.

Unfortunately, a certain amount of mutual mistrust and prejudice is present. The NGOs are sometimes still perceived as "irresponsible business associates", and their role is not clearly understood by the local government units, whereas the bodies of local authority are seen as "a bureaucratic, rigid and numbed apparatus". Therefore, education of officials and employees of the local governments, as well as better communication and mutual familiarising is needed.

It appears that there are "privileged" NGOs which are always awarded funding, regardless of the quality of their programmes, while the unprofessional behaviour on both sides is identified as a serious issue in some *millieus*.

By rule of thumb, the largest funds are given to sport clubs and non-profit organisations in culture, technological culture, health care and social welfare.

Finally, the under-representation of NGO representatives in municipal and county bodies hampers a more direct influence of NGOs on decision making on the local level. The influence of local NGOs on policy making and articulation is negligible, but certain steps have been made to changing that in near future.

Only after the government at the state level adopted a more open and positive attitude towards involvement of civil society organisations in the policy work, the local governments would be able to adopt the same attitude.

In the last ten years several initiatives were undertaken in regard with investigating further possibilities and opportunities for development of partnership of NGOs and local government; usually they are connected with the local government reform.

Purposes of partnership

In spite of the legal platform created at the national level, what is still missing at the local level, almost everywhere in Croatia, is a strategy that would be created and implemented at the local level, drafted both by the local government unit and NGOs, that would enable cooperation in a way that capacities of all sectors are used in synergy and with benefits for the community.

The importance of cross-sector partnership still needs to be communicated widely. Different sides take different roles, but with one common goal - improvement of the life of the local community.

Private sector should not be excluded from these strategies. There are only a few successful examples of cross-sector partnerships that include local government, NGOs and private sector, i.e. local companies. The private sector needs to be involved, asked, included, in spite of the fact that in some parts of the country the economic situation is much below the state average, and its possibilities in e.g. financially supporting the civil society organisations' initiatives are not substantial.

There are significant differences in comparison with the partnership of civil society organisations and state level agencies, ministries, which already reached a level when one can say that the partnership is institutionalised, it has its practice, code, regulations, and reached some standards. In addition to this, there are regional and local differences.

However, there are numerous examples of effective and useful cooperation.

It should not be forgotten that one of the purposes of partnership at the regional/local level, that needs to be emphasized, is in long-term increased accountability – for both sides, local government and civil society organisations.

Finally, although thorough decentralisation of the country was envisioned in the early days of Croatian independence, Zagreb continues to hold a firm grasp in almost every sector of Croatian politics, economy and administration. More effort is to be employed at decentralization, and thus influence also cooperation of local government and civil society organizations.

It is in this very aspect that the benefits of cooperation of local self-governing units and NGOs could be utilised to the greatest extent. Various services, such as care for children and elderly and health care are possibilities of cooperation in the social agenda; monitoring, prevention and sanitation of ecological damage are the second significant aspect of cooperation.

The last possibility mentioned here, but certainly not the final, is cooperation in community development and rural areas development.

Croatia only a couple of years ago joined the group of countries where businesses, NGOs and local governments engage in various forms of private - public partnership, yielding such results as fire homes, small hospitals or schools.

Along with the decentralisation that lies ahead the need for policy work done by the independent experts comes too – which means the civil society organisations that are active and experienced in respective fields should be able to get engaged in activities such as articulating or drafting policies for the local government in order to address issues of interest to them – and the community – not only from grassroots, but top-down approach as well.

Local governments should create an environment of cooperation, and open themselves to the voice from the field, to the NGOs, that are by definition quicker, more responsive, alert and that obtain information about issues in the community faster.

In the end, apart from the field of grassroots level initiatives and actions, the four areas for the partnership to be further developed and nurtured can be summarized to the following:

- ◇ the development of the community
- ◇ the development of the civil society
- ◇ the development and infrastructural projects
- ◇ and policy making and articulation.

MAIN FINDINGS

Why Beli Manastir Community

Beli Manastir is situated in Baranja, in the north - eastern part of Croatia. The city's name means literally "white monastery", although this meaning is derived from a folk etymology: while "beli" does mean "white" in many Slavic languages, including both Serbian and Croatian, the word is derived from the first part of the city's name in Hungarian: "Pélmonostor", which is derived from the Slavic word "pil" meaning "pillar".

The town's true name would thus be "pillar of a monastery". This name reflects and reminds us of the fate of the first monastery that was built there in the 9th century CE, by a Slavic duke named Kocelj.

The monastery was razed, and the only part that survived was the central pillar. The name later stuck, but changed its meaning into much more optimistic state. This region has always been a mosaic of diverse cultures: this is reflected in the region's demography. Apart from Croats, ethnic Germans, Magyars, Serbs and Roma form large communities.

For the most part, these cultures coexisted harmoniously, but there were turbulent periods when the harmony was disturbed by war and violence. The most recent example of such a time is the Croatian War for Independence, when the social structure of the community was utterly disrupted for almost a decade by enemy occupation.

Once one of the richest and most advanced Croatian regions, Baranja was devastated by the war. In the first years after the reintegration into Croatian territory, unemployment rarely fell below 50%, and the possibility of ethnic violence was never excluded. All life was divided in two categories: Serbian and Croatian, from cafés and shops to radio stations. Such was the fate of all the occupied regions of Croatia. Beli Manastir, however, differs from other regions: it found a way to peaceful coexistence.

Unfortunately, it had to be poverty that made both Croats and Serbs realize that they need to be united as a community if they are to survive. Soon, different NGOs were formed, that started post-conflict, educational and employment projects and programs for the citizens. One of these programs made it possible to include the Roma community in everyday life by educating them for their traditional arts and crafts and launching products as souvenirs of the region.

Women's NGOs also emerged, empowered and now productive, creating programs intended not only for women but the whole community. In spite of the recent war and pauperisation, Beli Manastir is one of the most socially modernised communities in Croatia today.

Interviews

Introduction

As a part of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with selected members of prominent NGOs from Beli Manastir and local government officials. The goal was to find out from the first hand how the partnership between civil sector and local government is experienced by the participants in it. Prior to the interviews, a focus group and a scenario workshop were organised in order to get better grasp of the situation and better understanding of the nature of relationships between the NGOs and local government as well as among the NGOs themselves.

Based on the findings two sets of broadly formulated interview questions were constructed: one for the members of civil society and one for the members of local government. These two sets of questions corresponded in most of the part since the intention was to investigate the same issues but from two different perspectives.

This approach proved justified because our interviewees from both sectors identified similar benefits as well as problems they encountered in mutual partnerships, but with somewhat different views on the expectations they have from the future.

The interviews were constructed based on four dimensions that were devised prior to the field research. These four dimensions are structure of partnership, external environment of the partnership, values of the partnership and impact of partnership.

The structural dimension dealt mostly with power relations among partners, be it financial dependence or autonomy and control over projects, mutual trust, communication channels and other forms of support (such as infrastructural support or expertise) partners can offer to each other.

The environmental dimension gathered aspects that more or less indirectly influenced partnerships, but are not related only to the NGO-local government partnership.

These can be broadly divided in the economic aspects (economic (under)development of the region, local entrepreneurship...) and socio-cultural aspects (multiethnicity, legal and political aspects).

The third dimension, values of the partnership, focused mostly on the questions of transparency, mutual trust and benefits and expectations partners have from each other, while the fourth dimension covered concrete impacts of the partnerships so far, as well as unused and underdeveloped potentials.

The Analysis

General conclusion we derived from the interviews could be named *unstructured partnership*. In other words, level of cooperation between local government and NGOs is relatively high and in the period of last five years has increased significantly. What is still lacking is a more structured and institutionalised basis for a long-term partnership and strategic planning of financing and partnership projects.

External environment of partnership

The findings on the environmental dimension will be presented first, because of their importance for understanding the context in which partnerships between NGOs and local government are realised. First of all, it must be emphasized that the city of Beli Manastir, as well as the entire region of Baranja, is area that was heavily affected by the war and occupation during '90s. Without going into in-depth analysis of the political and social consequences of that period, it must be said that economy of the region faced more than a significant setback that is still easily detected. All of our interviewees are well aware of economic underdevelopment of the region when compared to the rest of the Croatia. Because of the lack of local entrepreneurship network, so far cooperation between private and civil sector has been almost non-existent. Small donations and occasional support based on personal connections and acquaintances are rare and not significant for the functioning of NGOs.

There are several reasons for this situation. Beside economic underdevelopment, local companies and small businesses do not see any interest in investing in the civil society. Incentives from the state for funding civil society are limited to rare tax benefits that can be applied only to small percentage of NGOs' activities (actually they are limited to the educational activities and humanitarian relief). Also, interviewees reported that the private sector is not informed even about these rare benefits and thus it sees no interest in such cooperation.

In general, it can also be said that NGOs do not have a clear vision of what benefits private sector could have from them. No one reported of a project or an initiative that would try to involve local entrepreneurship with NGO's activities. One of the reasons why NGOs do not involve in such enterprises is of legal nature. The Associations Act does allow profitable activities for NGOs, exclusively when the profit is used solely for association's projects. Therefore, interviewees voiced out the need to change legislation in order to make profitable activities more accessible to NGOs.

Although the importance of economic growth of the region is almost self-explanatory, it should be mentioned that indications of connection between development of economy and development of civil society can be found in the interviews. In the last five years economic progress is observed by the interviewees and in the same period partnership between NGOs and local government has flourished. Similar remarks were made about the political situation that became more stable, indicating that synergy between economical and political progress also made possible for the civil society to develop, but it should also be noticed that the civil society played important role in the process of achieving political stability and especially ethnical tolerance.

Regarding multiethnicity of the region, significant progress is reported as well as an increase of tolerance. The civil society organisations gather more and more members of diverse ethnic background with the exceptions of folklore and women's associations, according to the reports of interviewees⁵. Tensions and a slight unease can still be detected when talking about "old problems" and some incidents still occur periodically (such as insulting graffiti).

Awareness of the "otherness" of Serbs is till present among politicians, also because voting on local elections is determined by ethnic origin. However, when it comes to the partnership between local government and NGOs, no ethnic problems were detected.

(5) Although, it must be said that members of these associations were not interviewed.

Even more, both the interviewees from the governmental and civil sector said that NGOs' activities bolstered tolerance and inter-ethnic cooperation on all levels.

Although we have mentioned that the economic situation in the region is relatively poor when compared to the rest of the Croatia, entrepreneurship climate in Beli Manastir itself is much better than in the surrounding municipalities. Several entrepreneurship/industrial zones have been opened recently and awareness about potential of the area is present. This positive mixture of political and economical progress combined with an increasing level of tolerance might explain the fact that many Roma people have moved into the area.

To sum up, economic, political and ethnic situation in Beli Manastir is relatively positive when compared with the rest of the region, and this could be one of the factors that explain a high level of cooperation between local government and NGOs. On the other hand, underdevelopment of the economy is still present, and is seen in the lack of strong private sector that could lend its resources to the development of the civil sector and the community in general. Both local and state policies, as well as NGOs' efforts should be more concerned about finding an appropriate model to encourage more partnerships between private and civil sector.

Structure of partnership

Current stand of all of the interviewees on the partnership between local government and NGOs is a positive one. The level of satisfaction varies, but everyone believes that cooperation is good, especially when compared with the situation five or seven years ago. A change has happened in both sectors, and not only political one. The civil society has developed and from the perspective of the local government the NGOs became more capable, more organised and more coherent in their goals. On the other hand the NGOs are pleased that people that currently occupy leading positions in the city are prepared for cooperation with the civil sector and keen on improving modes of partnership.

The main role that the local government plays in this partnership is the one of the supporter of the NGOs' activities. This support is of three kinds: financial, material/infrastructural, and political/institutional support. Financial support of the local government is of crucial significance for many of the smaller NGOs that almost solely rely on the funds provided by the local and state institutions. Larger NGOs have other sources of financing (such as foreign and domestic foundations for development of civil society), and thus are less dependent on the local government's donations, although these are still important source of their income. One of the main problems regarding financial relations is a limited city budget and a large number of NGOs among which divide it. Around thirty NGOs are registered in the city of Beli Manastir and all of them have some financial needs.

On the other hand, only sixteen of them have signed the Charter on Cooperation between the city of Beli Manastir and civil society organisations, and that number roughly represents active NGOs.

The procedure through which funds are allocated to NGOs is transparent to a certain point only. A public tender is held and after that allocations are made within the city budget, not according to the real needs of the applied projects, but according to the possibilities within the budget. In the end, all applicants receive a relatively small amount and usually need more funds from other sources. As said before, only smaller NGOs whose activities are of a smaller range can rely exclusively on these funds.

Too many NGOs to share a city budget is a problem recognised from both the local government and the NGOs and most of the interviewees voiced a need for some change in the funding procedure. The City of Beli Manastir already started cutting down financing of the NGOs with no real activities, and although this is welcomed by other more active NGOs they still perceive it as a not enough change. Two main concerns are being voiced out.

(6) Exceptions are inactive NGOs mentioned before

The first is regarding the sport clubs that receive more funds in a separate budget, and the second is a slight dissatisfaction with the lack of criteria when allocating funds. The former is a general issue of what type of activities is valued in the community, while the latter is a more serious issue of transparency that will be explored in greater depth.

Generally speaking, everyone is content with the level of transparency in the partnership between the City of Beli Manastir and NGOs.

The City publishes results of the public tender and their financial report on their web site and all the data and information are available upon demand. Same goes the other way around: NGOs send their financial reports regularly and the interviewed city officials are pleased with them⁶.

There is certain flexibility in this relationship, allowing NGOs to spend allocated funds loosely as long as that is in accordance with their proclaimed activities and not strictly with the proposed project's financial plan.

The main positive point is that most of the crucial financial information is circulating freely in both directions. Downside of the whole arrangement is two-sided. First of all, there are no clearly defined criteria that could serve as a basis for project writing and application, evaluation of applications, and later monitoring and control of the allocation of funds. Second, most of the arrangements about the needs for financial support are informal and happen independently of the public tender which is adjusted toward these informal arrangements. In the end, there is no perception of the lack of transparency because of the small community and good relations that current officials have with civil community.

However, some of the interviewees did say that some NGOs are a little bit privileged. They actually do not mind it because of the perception that these NGOs really need extra support, but clearer criteria for allocation of funds is recognised as a need for the future. It seems that the local government shares some views on this point with the NGOs, but does not have a clear idea how to solve this situation.

Therefore, it can be said that an informal mode of communication between the NGOs and local government has positive and negative effects. On the positive side there is mutual trust, possibility of quick solutions to occurring problems, and transparency based on the willingness of partners to share information. On the negative side there is a lack of clear criteria and implicit dissatisfaction with allocation of funds, a lack of objective transparency presentable through public means of communication and public archives. Although currently this negative side is not a real problem, in future it might turn out to be if the constellation of relationships between leading officials and leading NGOs changes regardless of the reason.

The second type of sponsorship is material and infrastructural. Although it is not a direct financial support, this type of sponsorship is crucial for functioning of NGOs since it includes provision of real estate given to NGOs for use.

Two spaces are provided by the City of Beli Manastir. The first one for the Association of disabled people of Baranja "Baranjsko srce", and the second for the joint use of several NGOs. The second one, called Community Home, is the property of the state, but it is rented and redone by the City of Beli Manastir. It became a central point for the activities of civil society in the city, gathering at one place several of the prominent local NGOs. Since the problem of the lack of office places for NGOs is voiced out as one of the major problems that hinders activities in of civil society organisations, and since there is no other source that could provide them, this kind of help by the city is especially valued and needed.

Political, or better to say institutional support that local government provides for the projects of the NGOs is the one that takes the least effort of the city, but is of extreme importance in the fundraising for the projects.

Official support of the local and state institutions gives credibility to projects and makes donors more willing to participate. Since the local government's budget is insufficient for activities of the civil society organisations, it supplements itself by such support and thus indirectly helps NGOs getting the necessary funds. This institutional partnership is not only one sided.

The City itself benefits from it, not only through activities of the sponsored NGO, but also through promotion and positive perception of the situation in the area that in turn fosters new donations (not only) in the civil sector but in the community in general.

Regarding the autonomy of action and decision making, NGOs did not voice any objection. If anything, in most of the cases involvement of the local government in the projects is rare after the sponsorship is given. More inclusion in some stages of some projects would be appreciated, especially in the cases where officials could provide some kind of expert help. But the same goes the other way around. The local government could use expertise that NGOs can offer and make use of them as advisory bodies. This has happened before in a limited scale: Association of Disabled was consulted about parking space and adjusting public building and places to the needs of the disabled, furthermore, advices on urban planning given by the civil sector were listened to, but generally speaking, this is a potential that is till much underused. The interviewees from the NGOs said that they are more experienced in project writing and planning than the city officials, and the same was confirmed in later talks with the city officials.

Thus, NGOs could be used both to educate employees in the local government's bodies and to write joint project proposals for the EU funds. Some of these potentials are recognised but only in part, and more communication that would encourage such cooperation and explore new potentials is necessary. The problem of lack of communication is voiced by majority of our interviewees, despite their general opinion that obtaining necessary information is easy. It seems that problem is not lack of communication as such, but of specific type of it. Namely, instead of demands for the direct support of any of the three types described above, both NGOs and local government should think about strategic long term partnerships and inform each other about the potentials they know they have and that could benefit the community⁷.

Values of partnership

As we have said in the introduction section, issues we have included in this dimension are those of transparency, mutual trust and benefits and expectations partners have from each other. Transparency was already discussed under the structure dimension, but it arose in this one too. The reason is that transparency is perceived by our interviewees as the basis for the quality partnership between NGOs and local government. One of the things both sides agree upon is that better communication and better cooperation between these two sectors has also improved transparency of the local government in general. Vice versa, demands to publish financial reports before they can apply for new funds from the city, has improved transparency in the management of the NGOs as well. Still, while the civil society organisations are pleased with the transparency on the behalf of the city of Beli Manastir, they stress out that other local municipalities do not follow their example.

In the City of Beli Manastir itself, problems with transparency lie in the fact that most of the communication is informal and that this informality extends to the budget forming. Although informal communication is something everyone likes and it enables them direct access to the city officials, it is also voiced out that the control of the finances should be stricter and that public tenders should be better organised. Whether the interviewees perceive that the informality that they praise is also causing non-transparency remains unclear. It also must be stressed that this lack of transparency is not result of bad intentions, corruption, or intention to hide something, but it is the result of the unstructured relations between the two sectors and lack of institutionalised procedures. This could potentially show its downside in different socio-political set of relations, as discussed before.

Mutual trust is high between partners and this is much due to personal contacts and informality.

(7) Lack of this kind of communication is a specific issue in the case of Beli Manastir, but a characteristic of Croatian civil policy in general.

As one of the interviewees said, “it is small community, everyone knows everyone, I could not lie even if I wanted to”. On the other hand, another interviewee said that “everyone knows everything about everyone, but doesn't really know anything”. This ambivalence, typical of small communities, illustrates the nature of relations and transparency risks one can face. Without clearer procedures trust could easily turn into mistrust, and accidental non-transparency to the corrupt one.

These quotes also illustrate the fact that partners do not have enough information about each other. Interviewees from the NGO sector admit that they are also to blame for it because they have not asked for information often enough. The City authorities, on the other hand, do not have a clear perception of what would interest NGOs in part because they are not informed enough about their purpose and goals.

Impact of partnership

Partnership between NGOs and local government has been successful in the last five years. Some of the impacts it had on the community are direct and easily detectable, while the other are assumed be in connection with the partnership. Among the latter, maybe the most important impact was an increase in multiethnic tolerance and cooperation. Both the officials from the local government and NGO representatives agree on this, and it is not surprising since many of the NGOs were or still are active in a broadly defined area of human rights.

Apart from that, very important for the development of civil society in general is the “Charter on Cooperation between the City of Beli Manastir and civil society organisations” which was signed by the City and the sixteen organisations and which defines general principles that future partnerships will follow. Although this is not an operational plan, it is a basis for the future civil society initiatives and a proof of good will on behalf of the city and NGOs.

All interviewees agreed that most success was made in projects dealing with education, care for elderly people and social care in general. Despite that, some of these areas are still thought of as the ones in which more joint cooperation is needed (care for elderly people, social care). There is also a lot to be done in urban planning and taking care of the city⁸.

Various youth projects are a specific case, because in the past they had been very successful, but the leaders of those projects left the city pursuing studies or finding a job in a more developed country. Therefore, although these projects did have an impact, currently there is not enough NGO activity that would involve younger people or provide activities for youth.

All of the participants agree that the impact NGOs have and could have on the community is great and that they are successful in recognising problems and needs of the community. The City officials are aware of this and they even voiced out that they would be glad if NGOs would more often suggest to them what should be done. Better communication is one of the prerequisites for this to happen.

Focus group

The focus group took place in Vijećnica, the hall of the City Council of Beli Manastir, on 8 July 2008. The participants were representatives of the local government (Deputy Mayor, Head of the Department for Culture and Social Actions, coordinators of the Department), civil society organisations (presidents or directors) and local media (journalists of the regional and local media). One person was a representative of both groups, since he held a position in the County and is a president of a Roma NGO. iDEMO team that led the focus group consisted of a moderator, facilitator and a recording assistant.

While it was obvious that all the participants were familiar with each other (having cordially greeted each other at the beginning of the focus group), it took them some time to relax in the communication with the iDEMO team.

⁽⁸⁾ For example, partnership of the city and “Baranjsko srce” was very successful in adapting access to the buildings of major institution for disabled people

However, once this barrier was overcome, the focus group took its course. The researchers decided to lead the participants through the four dimensions in the following order: 1. Values, 2. Context, 3. Structure and 4. Impact.

It is interesting to note that there were virtually no discrepancies in the participants' attitudes, which is not a very common occurrence in the relations between NGOs and local governments anywhere. Yet it appeared that the people of Beli Manastir worked in perfect harmony. Both groups of participants agreed that communication was difficult and full of mistrust in the first few years after the reintegration of the occupied Croatian territories in Baranja, Eastern Slavonija and Western Srijem. The sources of mistrust were mostly political and ethnic in nature, but when the current cabinet came to power in the city, both communication and relations began to improve.

The researchers asked the participants to name the most successful partnerships so far. The participants quickly agreed upon several projects, most notably one where the City provided the local NGOs with a house, giving them space for their activities; then a project where the NGOs helped combat allergies by mowing all of the city's green areas (ambrosia is a significant problem in Beli Manastir) during the allergy season; a series of very successful joint endeavours concerned the inclusion and employment of the Roma from Beli Manastir.

One of the most successful ones aimed to decrease a drop out of Roma children from schools - it included transportation for Roma children from Roma villages to the kindergarten and school, with a bus, and then the project grew to include the parents as well, and eventually influence the whole Roma community in the villages that belong to the Beli Manastir municipality. The other was important as it ensured employment for around sixty Roma people in maintenance of public areas, after which the demand for these jobs increased.

The biggest and most significant breakthrough took place with preparation and signing of the Charter of Cooperation that was signed between the City and the NGOs in spring this year. The NGOs expect that transparency and better procedures would be introduced, and the City expects NGOs to contribute to the quality of life of the community.

As for finances, the NGOs do not approve of the fact that sports organisations receive as much as five times the funds than the NGOs whose portfolio includes social and community activities do. When this issue was raised on the focus group, both the NGOs and the representatives of the local self government agreed that the City should allocate an agreed sum for that year, and then all the NGOs should decide the further distribution of finances among themselves (sic!).

The same was done with the sports clubs, and the methodology apparently works. Later during the discussion, it turned out that there is a need for better procedures, but letting NGOs themselves decide about the distribution of money for NGOs is not the best idea, and will not contribute to the transparency and accountability, but just the opposite, it could create problems in a long run.

Finally, what needs to be taken into account is the fact that for the community of Beli Manastir the war happened very recently, and that the community suffered enemy occupation for nearly a decade before reintegration back into the Croatian territory. Thus, for the members of the community, it is very important to know "who came from where and when", and also "when did they leave and why".

The key members of the local self administration are almost exclusively of Croatian nationality, and allowing Serbs to positions of power is still an unspoken taboo. On the other hand, all the participants spoke openly about this problem, and agreed that it was far more pronounced in the first years of the reintegration into the Croatian territory, and they all agreed that in the last five years their focus lies in the issues of importance for their lives today – high unemployment rate, very slow development, youth leaving the city.

Today, ethnic tolerance is the community's *modus operandi*, maybe in some part thanks to the way Beli Manastir and the surrounding lands were reintegrated into Croatia: peacefully and without bloodshed, as opposed to the fact that other occupied Croatian lands were recaptured by means of force.

Scenario workshop

The scenario workshop was organized in the same place where the focus group, with the same participant group. It aimed primarily at the third and fourth dimension, namely: the values of partnership and its impact.

The researchers asked the participants to elaborate their thoughts on the development of their community in the next five years, discuss it, and select five areas where, in their opinion, cooperation between the NGO sector and local government would have the most merit, or where the need for cooperation would be greatest.

The participants were divided in two groups, NGO and local government. As an interesting note, the representative of a Roma NGO chose to join the local government group instead of the NGO one, since he also holds a position in the County (but not the City!).

The two groups selected the following five areas of cooperation:

Local government	NGOs
1. Urban planning and development	1. Environment protection
2. Environment protection	2. Development projects
3. Development projects	3. Human rights
4. Science, education and culture	4. Urban planning and development
5. Ethnic minorities	5. The media

There was an atmosphere of mutual familiarity at the workshop, as Beli Manastir is a small community and it was obvious that all the members knew each other very well.

This may have been both an advantage and a disadvantage: on the one hand, it was quite obvious that all the participants were very comfortable with each other, and had no problem being honest with each other in front of the researchers, while on the other hand this very familiarity may have caused the participants to omit mentioning important information relating to past events or the participants themselves, because they felt it was part of a context all parties were aware of.

During the discussion it became obvious that both the NGOs and the local self governments understood partnerships not only in ways that have been demonstrated to them in the early nineties, when NGOs first entered the Croatian societal scene, but that they moved forward.

That was particularly obvious when the presidents of two most influential and most active NGOs spoke about their plans, strategies, and attitudes towards the local government, and in the Deputy Mayor contributions.

None of the participants gave merit to the thought of partnerships in economic projects or in policy making. NGOs see the local self government primarily twofold: as a source of funding and as a good source for recommendation in projects with external partners.

The City has begun to look at NGOs as serious partners in recent years, but has no clear picture to what extent the partnership could extend, and how they can act together better, not only in these two fields but in general.

In such a constellation of attitudes, cooperation on a higher level in these two areas – economic development and policy making – will be very challenging, and will probably demand external help, either in form of education, trainings or facilitation in creating the strategy/ies.

Public hearing

The public hearing took place in the Ljepotica building, the City of Beli Manastir, on 19 September 2008. The representatives of the media, local government and civil society organisation, as well as citizens, were invited to the public hearing. A whole day before the event the most popular local radio station had been announcing the event. However, the turnout was disappointing.

Simona Goldstein and Matija Sinkovic from iDEMO team presented the main findings, including some recommendations for improvement, and invited the audience to comment on it and ask for questions. Since the audience was small, very soon the public hearing turned into a lively conversation with the president of one of the city's main NGOs, and representatives of the local government, Deputy Mayor and Head of the Department for Culture and Social Actions. Only one local media journalist participated.

During discussion, the representatives of the local government openly asked how things could be improved, what kind of knowledge, expertise and education they need, where they can turn for more information and assistance. The general feeling was that this type of discussion has been much needed, facilitated by someone who is from “outside”.

Since the iDEMO team had not imposed anything, just presented the findings and specified certain areas for improvement where with some effort a lot could be achieved, there was no feeling that any of these two sides had been criticised, which helped both sides to join discussion with some new ideas or questions that had not been asked before. When closing the discussion, the iDEMO team announced that it would send recommendations for change to both the local government and the NGOs in the city, which was welcomed and commented as much needed. The event lasted for more than hour and a half.

Factors

The partnership arrangements in the past five years in the City of Beli Manastir were primarily influenced by the change of focus from post-war issues, conflict resolution, and peaceful reconciliation towards the improvement of quality of life in the community. The shift took place after reaching a certain standard regarding human rights protection and improvement, and after realizing that they were all facing problems that bothered all citizens regardless of their ethnic origin.

The following shift will begin to take place once the local government and the NGOs realise that development of their community, at all levels but primarily at the economic one, is the next issue to be addressed by common actions.

Furthermore, the partnership arrangements were also influenced by the change of roles that both sides had had. The NGOs' activities “crossed the line” and started to be engaged in the areas that were “reserved” for the state since practically the World War II, i.e. social care, youth, employment, education...etc.

The City became a medium, and not only the decision-maker and the “bag of money”, and started to support initiatives that have, as they saw it in the beginning, interfered with their work. Accepting the roles of NGOs as partners in the community was one of the major breakthroughs.

Financially, the City as well as the NGOs, do not stand well. The NGOs are forced to look for resources everywhere, from state agencies and ministries to foreign donors.

The City does not have the budget big enough to cover all major items on the agenda, but realizes the need to support NGOs and distributes certain part of its budget to sports clubs, cultural NGOs, and NGOs that are of most interest to us – those with social agenda, those that run projects in the field of democracy promotion, human rights, marginalized groups, economic issues, youth, education and trainings.

Capacities differ. The City has resources (to some extent), contacts, but lacks a group of competent project managers who could initiate and carry out projects in cooperation with both the local NGOs and private sector. The NGOs have expertise and project managers, but they lack resources and platforms for their projects.

The both sides slowly realize that working together is necessary, and that synergy could bring benefit to their community and achieve what they could not on their own. The ways of cooperation yet need to be taken to another step on the ladder, as the current ones are satisfactory now, but will not be in few years time.

Recommendations

After analysis of the findings, iDEMO team summarized recommendations for change in three main directions, numbered below. All three could be elaborated upon in more details, with specific steps, task and activities within each, and should be used for articulation of strategies and eventually for policy making.

1) In order to make the allocation of funds and support to the civil society sector transparent, the City should establish a procedure and set criteria for allocation of the funds for civil society organisations. It should also introduce monitoring and evaluation procedures, and foster relationships with the civil society organisations as much as possible.

2) The civil society organisations should approach the City with concrete proposals for further development of their relationship - they can certainly offer services so much needed by the City, which they already perform within their scope of work, or they can modify them and introduce new ones. Post-war period demanded certain type of activities; both sides should adjust their work, expectations and operational mode to the situation today.

There are several areas in which the attention of the civil society organisations is much needed, such as environment protection, urban planning, youth, unemployment of marginalised groups, etc.

3) Both the City and the civil society organisations should embrace opportunities that are arising, and employ their capacities, expertise and experience as well as contacts so as to advance their cooperation, develop new projects, new programs, and thus not only address certain issues and problems in the community, but also enable further development both on economic and societal levels.

This recommendation is particularly important for the upcoming period, when the community should be prepared for the European structural and other funds, and when it needs to work in capacity building for project proposal preparation, project management and other task with which the both sides are not very familiar with.

General conclusions

In spite of the existing - and rather developed - framework for cooperation of the public and civil sector in Croatia in general, there are certain obstacles and barriers in the development. The local government units have certain autonomy that is necessary for its functioning; this reflects in both the positive and negative way.

Decentralisation has not yet been fully implemented, and this still determines the way local communities function.

There are examples of more developed areas and regions, in which the local civil society organisations work in close partnership with the local self government, and there are those in which such partnership is not seen as natural and useful, and where partnership depends exclusively on the personal relations among citizens.

In case of less developed regions, such as those affected by the war, or islands communities, civil society organisations play extremely important role and complement local government institutions, bringing in communities both the energy, knowledge, innovative approaches and even resources, offering the positive incentive to the population to remain living and working in the rural areas.

However, there are opportunities for improvement in the urban and more developed areas as well.

The current nature of partnership in the City of Beli Manastir can be characterized as above the Croatian average in quality and number of projects related to the size of the community.

It is one of the rare cities in Croatia that has signed Charter of Cooperation with the civil society organisations.

The communication among them is constant and lasting, and it can be said that to certain extent both sides are working on involvement of the other side when planning projects and activities.

However, there are several areas where their partnership could be improved or established, and they are to be addressed at administrative, operational and strategic level.

Appendices

Appendix 1

REGULATION ON THE GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR COOPERATION WITH NGOs

Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs was founded by the Regulation on Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs in 1998 with the aim of performing expert work within the domain of Croatian Government as regards to creating conditions for partnership and cross-sectoral cooperation and with non-profit sector, especially with organizations in the Republic of Croatia.

The Office has a wide scope of activities, from cooperation in creating and proposing new legislative frameworks for the activity of nongovernmental, non-profit sector in the Republic of Croatia, monitoring the implementation of the adopted draft of the Cooperation Programme between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Non-governmental, Non-profit Sector in the Republic of Croatia and proposing improvements of that Programme to establishing a programme, standards and recommendations for financing the activity of civil society organizations from the state budget and other public funds, as well as pre-accession and structural funds of the European Union.

08.11.2006, Official Gazette no.: 121

DECISION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT AND THE APPOINTMENT OF ITS CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERS

The Council is an advisory and expert institution of the Republic of Croatia, which shall work on developing the implementation and efficiency of the adopted Cooperation Programme between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Non-governmental, Non-profit Sector in the Republic of Croatia, development of civil society strategy, development of philanthropy, social capital, partnership and cross-sectoral cooperation in conditions of decentralized decision-making and financing system

19.03.2002, Official Gazette no.: 26

DECISION ON AMENDMENTS TO THE DECISION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE APPOINTMENT OF ITS CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERS

The number of members appointed by the Government of the Republic of Croatia increases.

15.07.2003, Official Gazette no.: 111

DECISION ON AMENDMENT TO THE DECISION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The list of institutions based on whose proposal the Government of the Republic of Croatia appoints members of the Council is changed.

17.03.2004, Official Gazette no.: 112

DECISION ON AMENDMENTS TO THE DECISION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE APPOINTMENT OF ITS CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERS

The Chairperson of the Council is chosen by the members of the Council - representatives of organizations and other non-governmental, non-profit legal persons and representatives of experts from civil society.

31.01.2007, Official Gazette no.: 11

RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The Council for the Development of Civil Society shall act and operate based on the provisions of this Rules of Procedure.

May, 2007

ACT ON NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

The Foundation is established with the main objective of promotion and development of civil society in the Republic of Croatia. For the purpose of achieving its main objective, the Foundation offers professional and financial support to programmes that encourage the sustainability of the non-profit sector, cross-sectoral cooperation, citizens' initiatives, philanthropy, volunteer work, improves democratic institutions of society, as well as to other programmes which fulfil the main objective of the Foundation.

31.10.2003, Official Gazette no.: 173

NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA FOR INTEGRATION INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION 2004

This Programme, which is passed once a year, in the chapter Political Criteria, expressly refers to encouraging further development of civil society organizations and their inclusion in the creation, implementation and monitoring of public politics. In addition, the adopted draft of the Cooperation Programme between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Non-governmental, Non-profit Sector in Croatia is also stated as a fundamental document. In the abovementioned facts and by monitoring and evaluating the implementation of aims planned in the Programme, the wish of the Republic of Croatia to strengthen the role of civil society organizations in promoting European values is evident.

23.03.2004, Official Gazette no.: 37

RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE CROATIAN GOVERNMENT

The Rules of Procedure of the Croatian Government lay down the structure and mode of conduct and operation of the Croatian Government, especially the manner of calling and holding its sessions. Since the Government discusses and decides on issues within its scope precisely at its sessions, the Rules of Procedure represent the current potential extent of public participation, including that of civil society organisations, in the decision-making process. It should be especially noted that, in recent years, representatives of state administration and civil society organisations have jointly participated in the preparation and drafting of several regulations to improve the activities of civil society organisations.

15.12.1999, Official Gazette no.: 138

RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE CROATIAN PARLIAMENT

The work and structure of the Croatian Parliament is regulated by these Rules of Procedure.

30.03.1992, Official Gazette no.: 17

Appendix 2

THE ASSOCIATIONS ACT

The Associations Act regulates the establishment and activities of associations as the most numerous type of civil society organizations in Croatia. The act elaborates the right of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution to associate in any form of free and voluntary union of a number of natural or legal persons, for the purpose of protection of their interests or the promotion of their human rights and freedoms, and their ecological, humanitarian, informational, cultural, national, pro-natalist, educational, social, expert, sports, technical, medical, scientific or other convictions and objectives, without the intention of generating profit.
11.10.2001, Official Gazette no.: 88

THE ACT ON FOUNDATIONS AND FUNDS

The Act on Foundations and Funds stipulates the manner of establishment and functioning of a specific type of civil society organisation – foundations, which are properties assigned to serve by themselves, or through their generated income, serve to the accomplishment of some generally beneficial or charitable purpose.
01.06.1995, Official Gazette no.: 36

ACT ON AMENDMENTS TO THE ACT ON FOUNDATIONS AND FUNDS

This Law regulates the foundation, organization, activity and termination of foundations and funds, registration and termination of foreign foundations' representatives, i.e. funds, and supervision of their work.
16.07.2001, Official Gazette no.: 64

THE INSTITUTIONS ACT

The Institutions Act regulates the establishment and activities of institutions as organisations to permanently perform activities related to education, science, culture, information, sport, physical education, technical culture, child care, health care, social welfare, care for the disabled and other activities, provided they are not performed for the purpose of generating profit. An institution may be established by citizens as natural persons, thus it can belong to civil society organisations, while public institutions are mostly established by the State or regional and local self-government units.
16.08.1993, Official Gazette no.: 76

THE ACT ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The Act on Humanitarian Assistance applies to associations, religious communities and other national and foreign non-profit legal persons, so-called “humanitarian organisations”, whose statutory objectives include the provision of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance, as defined by this Act, means collected material and financial goods, expert and lay psycho-social assistance (psychological help and help in social adaptation) and services provided for the socially handicapped under special regulations, services provided for the victims of natural and other catastrophes and individuals whose income does not exceed the level of the national poverty threshold.
10.06.2003, Official Gazette no.: 96

THE ACT ON THE CROATIAN RED CROSS

Croatian Red Cross is a national, humanitarian and voluntary alliance of the leagues of county Red Cross societies' associations and associations of town and municipal Red Cross societies acting based on the principles of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement enjoying a special protection and care of the Republic of Croatia. The task of the Croatian Red Cross is to achieve humanitarian goals and duties in the sphere of health care and improvement, social welfare, health and humanitarian education and it promotes the

observance of international humanitarian law and human rights protection.
24.10.2001, Official Gazette no.: 92

THE POLITICAL PARTIES ACT

Political parties are, with their free foundation and permanent activity in the formation of citizens' political will, an expression of democratic multiparty system, which is one of the highest values of the constitutional system of the Republic of Croatia. With the establishment of political parties citizens are guaranteed the right free association for the purpose of protecting their interests or promoting their political, social, economic, national, cultural or other convictions and objectives. Political parties, as defined by this Act, are associations whose objectives are expressed in their programme and statute, aimed at creating and forming citizens' political will and at political activity.

16.08.1993, Official Gazette no.: 76

THE FIRE BRIGADES ACT

Fire fighting activity is an expert and humanitarian activity of importance to the Republic of Croatia. This activity is performed by fire brigades, volunteer fire departments and fire-fighters' associations as expert and humanitarian organizations, which have a right to relieves and benefits according to regulations and which are established, function and cease to function in compliance with the provisions of the act regulating the establishment and functioning of associations.

15.10.1999, Official Gazette no.: 106

THE SPORTS ACT

In the Republic of Croatia the development of sports is stimulated by the construction and maintenance of sports facilities, education and training of professionals, scientific projects in the field of sports, economic measures, by stimulating partnerships of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in sports and private entrepreneurship, and financing sports from state funds, local and regional self-government units and the City of Zagreb funds. Sport has to be equally available to everyone, notwithstanding their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, social position, political or any other conviction.

28.06.2006, Official Gazette no.: 71

THE LABOUR LAW

This Law regulates labour relations in the Republic of Croatia, provided that some other law or international agreement that was concluded and authorized in compliance with the Constitution and then published, does not stipulate otherwise. The Labour Law is a general labour regulation stipulating fundamental employee rights and employer's obligations. On the labour market, associations are completely equal to other employers in all segments of labour regulations implementation and the implementation of other regulations defining employee rights and employers' obligations. The Labour Law, among other things, regulates the work of unions and employers' associations.

08.06.1995, Official Gazette no.: 38

Presently, three employers' associations of a higher rank are registered in the Republic of Croatia, with the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship. These are Croatian Employers' Association (HUP), Independent Employers' Associations Alliance (SNUP) and the Confederation of Croatian Industry and Entrepreneurs (KHIP). HUP is the only representative employers' association.

Croatian Employers' Association

Since the time of the Labour Law implementation and registration of unions' associations in accordance with the conditions stipulated by the Law, 23 unions' associations of higher rank have been established in the Republic of Croatia. The representativeness of unions' associations is defined by the Act on the Method of Determining Higher Rank Unions' Associations Participation in Tripartite Bodies at the National Level.

25.02.1999. Official Gazette no.: 19

There are 6 representative union head offices

1. Croatian Trade Union Association
 2. Croatian Independent Unions
 3. Croatian Independent Unions Alliance
 4. Association of Croatian Workers' Unions
 5. Trade Union of Services UNI-CRO
 6. Central Association of Croatian Public and Civil Services Unions
- central webpage is not active

THE ACT ON LEGAL POSITION OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Church or other religious community under some other name is, for the purpose of this Act, defined as a community of natural persons practicing their freedom to denomination with the equal public performance of religious ceremonies and other demonstrations of their faith, entered in the Register of Religious Communities of the Republic of Croatia. Hence, the Act on Legal Position of Religious Communities does not explicitly define religious communities as non-profit legal persons acting in the interest of general good, but it still contains provisions implying that type of religious communities' activities.

16.07.2002, Official Gazette no.: 83

Appendix 3

CITY – A LEGAL DEFINITION

The Law on Local and Regional Self – government, brought by the Croatian Parliament in 2001, Article 5, provides a definition of a city:

A city is an unit of a local self-government and a residence of a county (County of Srijem, County of Zagreb, County of Osijek-Baranja etc.) , as well as every settlement with more than 10 000 inhabitants, representing urban, historical, environmental and economic unit.

◇ On an exceptional basis, a settlement with less than 10 000 inhabitants can also be considered a city if it is considered eligible by the Law of Local and Regional Self-government.

◇ Every city has its own statute which defines the city's local activities, organization of government, administrative powers and modus of work, law enforcement...

◇ A city can transfer some activities to a county's governing body by a decision of the city council in accordance with the Statute.

◇ Cities with more than 30 000 inhabitants can administer activities from a county's district local level activities.

◇ Cities are independent in decision making in the field of its local activities.

◇ Public administration activities that are carried out by units of local self-governance are regulated by the law. All the emerging costs are financed from the national budget.

◇ A city council is the city's governing body with legislative action on the local level. It also administers other activities in accordance with the law and Statute.

◇ A number of members in the City council is defined by the Statute. The number of its members has to be uneven. Members' mandate lasts for four years.

◇ In accordance with the law citizens can also take part in decision making, which is provided to them by the institute of referendum.

◇ A mayor and municipality (city government) are a city's executive bodies.

◇ A city council is the competent body towards municipality.

◇ A mayor is elected by the majority of all the members in the city council.

Appendix 4

NGO – A LEGAL DEFINITION

According to the Associations Act, an association is **"any form of voluntary association of persons and legal persons, resident in the Republic of Croatia, for the purpose of protection and promotion of their environmental, economic, humanitarian, informational, cultural, ethnic and national, educational, social, professional, sports, technical, medical, scientific or other convictions and objectives, without the intention of generating profits, and who submit to the rules which define organization and activities of that form of association, unless the law provides otherwise."** (Official Gazette-henceforward:OG, 70/97 and 106/97)

Croatian legal system recognizes three types of legal entities that are considered to be non-governmental, non-profit organization:

1. foundations
2. associations of citizens
3. and private non-profit organisations (institutions).

An association is considered legal entity (legal person) once it is officially registered (signed in registry of associations), founded by a minimum of 3 founders (natural or legal persons). Associations are allowed to perform their activities to accomplish their statutory goals. The Statute is the basic (founding) act of an organisation (association). All other acts have to be in accordance with the Statute. Associations are financed from their members (by their membership fees), donations and gifts, by conducting their activities, donations from national budget, municipality, city and county budgets and funds and other financing that is in accordance with the law. Associations can also receive funding (supplementary financing) from the national budget. The State has to announce calls (give the invitation to tender).The competition can only be announced for officially registered associations. The Associations Act, article 23: "(2)The amount of financial assistance from the state budget is specified in the annual budget. Parameters for defining associations of interest to Croatia are specified by the Croatian Parliament, based on a proposal of the Government, and according to the programs of the associations.(3)The provision of Paragraph 2 applies to subsidies from the budgets of local governmental and administrative bodies."

The property of the association includes financial assets from membership fees, donations, organisations, performing various registered activities, subsidies from the state budget, municipality, city and county budgets and funds, its real estate and other tangible property, as well as other property rights.

The Associations Act contains legislative provisions that provide a detailed insight in not only organization and constitution of an association but also its obligations, financing, business activity as well as reasons for the end of its existence.



IN- COUNTRY REPORT ROMANIA

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STUDY MOTIVATION

The dynamic core of modern societies comprises a series of social situations with complex meanings and implications. Social actors choose or are assigned different trajectories in order to accomplish certain social goals, and differ in terms of performance of their duties, while the need for cooperation in carrying out each component of the social edifice is neglected most often.

Controversy underlying the work of public institutions is circumscribed to a more widespread problem. An analysis of their activity has to take into consideration factors such as the ability to perform the tasks formally assigned to them, the proof of public utility, and compliance with legislative frameworks. Against this background we may notice various perspectives, often contradictory, about the usefulness of their collaboration with other organizations, whether public or among private institutions.

An additional sense that the coordinated efforts of several social actors favour the solving of both particular and common problems is, unfortunately, by a very large measure at odds with the interests of institutions relying on public budget.

This is where the present study finds opportunity to set into.

The number of views held by representatives of institutions that bear social responsibility and engage in commitment to social roles brings evidence of conjunction as well as departing points for divergence; their comparative self-affirmation highlights ways in which we may find beneficial effects to facilitate a consistent transition to more internally coherent associative forms of cooperation, indicative of partnership.

The present study is designed as a tool in obtaining honest views from all those involved in social space activities, and it is also meant to introduce provisional guidelines to be consolidated by future in-depth research activities.

Responses collected regard dilemmas that public institution representatives must overcome, and methods of achieving this, in order to develop truly effective collaboration to the benefit of local communities by means of partnership with other social actors.

The results of the study can be useful for civil society and NGO by seeking out accurate descriptions of the present social institutional conditions and of the limits which they impose, since the existing legislation is governing only formal relationships, remotely effective when disconnected from the partnership principle of interdependent collaborators sharing trust.

Data-analysis reflects on two dimensions: public institutions empowered with political authority in decision-making and policy design (narrowed in this case to the subject of Local Public Administration, LPA); and, the Associative Environment of the third sector, active social actors of the civil society involved in mediating communication between political authorities and the general public or local communities (met by the generics of non-governmental organizations, NGOs, so as to better serve research purposes).

In view of better assessing the chances of success or failure in addressing partnership-specific issues, the present study makes progress by setting up different scales and indexes to adequately suit the quantitative and qualitative representations of relevant indicators.

Therefore, a few criteria act as backbone for substantiality in evaluating both LPA and NGO accounts of rapport interplay:

- a) legitimacy in decision-making as acknowledged by local communities – partiality to LPA self-sufficiency or to NGO partnership?;
- b) risks associated with NGO collaboration, as considered by LPA representatives;
- c) ways of dealing with challenges posed by political affiliation and ensuing inter-party tensions affecting LPA-NGO channels of communication;
- d) eligibility filters in deciding funding for projects and justifications accordingly;
- e) confidence and respect-earning in the process of partnership;
- f) bureaucratic limits to cross-sector interaction;
- g) designing strategies for development and the consultational value of civic forums;
- h) a common-ground methodology to the benefit of all actors and institutions involved in community development projects.

1. Introduction: NGO-Local Public Administration Partnership, from virtuality to patterned social practice

The core of the present study is concerned with the greatest variation in the way the partnerships occur throughout county communities in Romania, in the particular case of a horizontal axis – the involvement of NGOs in the run up of the local affairs and local governance.

Nevertheless, in Romania, the development of appropriate legal and fiscal environments for the functioning and participation of NGOs in local affairs and local governance has been rather advanced; still, problems occur in real life situations when there is still a wide gap particularly in between de facto and de jure involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs).

Local governments are paying lip-service to the relationship with NGOs; partnerships remain at the stage of ticked actions, sometimes required by external donors, sometimes prompting the willingness of politicians to comply with requirements for further integration of the country in the greater framework of International Organizations.

Partnerships are too much inclined to lean on the efficiency side, targeting outputs at the cost of outcomes that the whole community will benefit from in a long term perspective. Hence, once a joint project is completed, the relationship between local governments and NGOs does not spur into a follow up.

That has indirectly led to another downside, that is, the fragmentation of partnership. The mainstream of short-term project-based partnership through NGOs and local governments has resulted in too many one-off interventions of limited duration that often overlap and are uncoordinated.

No local strategy has been created for the partnership between NGOs and local governments that may fill in the gap of sometimes vague, non-explicit national legislation.

The concept of “**partnership**” between the public and the private, specifically between local public administration (LPAs) and NGOs in sharing dimensions of decision-making processes, represents a culmination of democratic institutional practice.

The present paper is concerned with a Romanian case study of relations among civil society organizations and political authorities in approaching the open agenda for community projects and social development. Shortcomings, challenges, as well as recommendations, are described in a normative mode of reasoning following up on actual findings resulting from descriptive analysis and in-field research, by means of probing guidelines such as:

- a) purposes of partnership, various roles of different partners in different settings and evolving local policy context;
- b) contribution of NGOs partnership to local programme efficiency, programme effectiveness, structural change, innovation development;
- c) transparency and legitimacy based on an increased accountability of local governments to the local constituencies;
- d) factors which influence partnership arrangements including maturity, history, roles, range of partners, strategic and operational dimensions and constraints, costs, and capacity;
- e) influences on partnership and involvement of NGOs in community projects for development;
- f) general conclusions drawn about the current nature of partnership in the communities concerned.

2. Report on NGOs partnership with local public administration in Romania. Overall picture:

2.1. The structure of Romanian civil society reveals both low levels of citizen participation and a rather poor level of organization. Political socialization is by large one of the less developed processes in the civic education of the population, while high levels of political participation (although they are less frequent nowadays) are unreliable indicators in reflecting a genuinely participative democratic culture supported by a civic duty to engage in community responsibilities. The first aspect of the earlier mentioned is mainly a result of inculcated traditional, rural or parochial values which did not provide sufficient incentives for the development of a genuine, politically-engaged civil society, a condition intensely speculated by communist era associations and ideology which slowed down the development of modern civil society. Moreover, when people speak of “civil society”, they actually only mean NGOs, and do not take into account the diversity of existing CSOs, such as trade unions, employers associations and professional associations, which “disappointingly proves the inherent misunderstanding of actively required social practices even by communist standards”. The second aspect, related to organization and management issues, has to do with a limited scope of networking among civil society organizations (CSOs), due to lack of financial resources **and** of qualified personnel.

Charities, state funds and private companies' contributions remain limited although incremental interest is arising. This is where regional resource centers play an important role in relating to NGO activity, by improving cooperation and communication, initiating joint projects, pooling resources, diversifying sustainability in relation with rural NGOs, small and medium enterprises, universities, public institutions, especially local government and local stakeholders. Partnerships and a successful history of associations present a good way to encourage donors to become mobilized for locally-specific consistency of coordination in complementary fields of activity. In order to organize sustainability and stability of a common front of action, identifying priority needs and adequate resources must come prior and not ulterior to practice. **Infrequent channelling of funds may be brought about by criticism of NGOs' shortage in** effectively voicing and addressing civil society's common interests and concerns; **nevertheless**, due to reasons ranging from financial issues to personal mistrust, Romanian CSOs are scaling down relying on foreign financial support, and this turns into “informal types of cooperation being preferred to formal coalitions”.

2.2. Civil society environment in Romania has been improving over the last few years, despite its struggle to cope with the negative legacy of the totalitarian regime and only moderately succeeding in negotiating *path-dependency* effects. A reformed environment **is highly** conducive of long-term sustainability; on the other hand, corruption has the most negative influence on the development of civil society. The level of cooperation between civil society and the government, business sector and public at large remains rather low (the CIVICUS assessment found that private companies are mostly seen as indifferent towards civil society). This not only endangers CSOs' financial sustainability, but also raises questions about the broader legitimacy of civil society advocacy activities. Because “many CSOs lack real, local constituencies, they have become oriented towards foreign and institutional donors”.

A particular deviation is that, due to the specific structure of the Romanian economy, with a very large public sector and state owned companies, CSOs' efforts have focused more on holding the state accountable and less on holding private companies accountable. Cooperation among CSOs remaining weak, and unfortunately, there is only limited involvement of citizens in associational life; this is not totally unrelated to a disturbing finding about the general public, that 90% of Romanian population do not trust peer citizens: this clearly inhibits the development of a mass-based civil society. Asked about the public image and the credibility of the NGO sector, the great majority of those interviewed generalized from particular cases to the entire third sector concerning political leaders' and oligarchic-type fraud concealed behind NGO activity.

Counterintuitively, even if the Romanian citizens lack confidence towards public institutions and NGOs, at the same time many consider that the state should be responsible for financing the largest number of the social services. Most of the Romanian people still see in the state the primary source for social services. Romanian civil society has not managed to develop a *commonly acknowledged and shared identity*.

There are *fundamental values* which are sought after in an attempt to better configure and consolidate the Romanian civil society. Although CSOs are active in promoting transparency in public affairs, the existence of genuine internal *transparency* and *accountability* within CSOs remains limited. While CSOs generally comply with all transparency requirements towards international donors, they are less interested in opening themselves to public scrutiny domestically. *Democracy* and *tolerance* are values that Romanian CSOs have promoted, as made apparent by the fact that since the fall of the totalitarian regime in 1989 civil society actors have been actively involved in rebuilding the Romanian society on the basis of democratic institutions and inter-ethnic tolerance. *Environmental sustainability* and, particularly, *gender equality* are not regarded as “traditional” or indigenous values by most of Romanian society, and are embraced by a limited number of social actors. However, the CSI revealed that CSOs active in promoting these values have become essential partners (if not indispensable, as in the case of environmental NGOs) for the Government and foreign donors, and that they are catalysts for social change (engaging projects aimed at eradicating poverty). NGO activity is directly linked to managerial reform; the functions of the NGOs include *representing group interests within a society; intermediating the relationship between citizens and authorities; supplying goods and services to the community; facilitating the social and political integration of citizens*.

The CIVICUS assessed the overall impact of Romanian civil society initiatives to be only moderate. CSO representatives identified a particularly strong role played by civil society in meeting societal needs directly. Similarly important, segmental addressing is more common than societal aim: CSOs have been more successful at informing and educating citizens and empowering marginalized people than in building capacity for collective action, concentrating more often on aiding economically or socially vulnerable groups. They also have sought to increase their methods of self-financing, through volunteerism, contracts with private partners, and so on. Finally, NGOs have diversified their activities, main areas of service supplied by NGOs that directly responded to community needs and that are addressed in cooperation with local authorities including civic, cultural, economic, environmental, social development and capacity building issues (the last being the area of most interest to public administrations). Nevertheless, CSOs' activities continue to remain invisible to the majority of the population, and CSOs are more oriented to the donors' priorities and unable to build local constituencies. CSOs have become more involved in influencing public policy, which made the majority of stakeholders consider that civil society in Romania has reached a visible level of maturity, specialization and professionalism; Romanian civil society managed to become a credible partner for foreign donors and therefore has benefited from their support.

2.3. While at the national level the *autonomy of civil society* is not considered a major problem, at the local level a more visible influence of public authorities on CSO work has been reported. In many localities there is a dependent and clientelistic relationship between CSOs and the public administrations and political actors. Local self-governance is critical to the development of democracy because it is the primary linkage between the people and authority: “local governments are often the best positioned to conclude agreements with NGO's as they may be closer to the individuals receiving services and may have better relations with the NGO's than the national government” (ICNL, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, *Model Provisions for Laws Affecting Public Benefit Organizations*, 2002, p.8).

These processes depend, on the one hand, on the *legal framework and institutional design*, and, on the other hand, on more practical factors like *political culture, socialization and performance*.

Arguably, in Romania only a limited range of CSOs have received (unconditional, politically-unbiased) state support up to the present moment. Legal mechanisms for direct funding of NGO activities by the Romanian state were previously available only in several areas such as sports, assistance to the disabled, social assistance, and human rights (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2000).

State-CSOs dialogue has come about on a largely ad-hoc basis. Although the efforts to establish institutionalized relationships between NGOs and the government date back to 1994, relationships with central government significantly improved a couple of years later when the role of NGOs in Romanian society was openly acknowledged.

Since then, the government has established systems and structures to enable dialogue with the sector at both national and local levels. At the *central government level*, each Ministry set up an office to interact with NGOs, through consulting with and informing NGOs about governmental programs and activities. At the *local level*, liaison officers deal with NGOs.

NGOs generally feel that interaction is better at the local level, whereas at the national level, CSOs are sometimes invited to participate in the formulation of new legislation or policies (although civil society representatives argue that it is mainly for PR purposes and that actually the Government rarely takes into account suggestions coming from civil society).

There is very limited access to the legislature, which inhibits the contribution of NGOs to the development of public policy (USAID 2003 NGO Sustainability Index).

In the process, the government's perception of NGOs has continuously improved and NGOs' expertise and contributions are increasingly being acknowledged. During the regional consultations, stakeholders indicated that another reason for the improved relations between CSOs and the State was the appointment of former CSO leaders and experts to these government offices.

2.4. A favourable legislative context for the emergence of a democratic civil society in Romania

The emergence of NGOs was made possible by Law 8/31 December 1989 concerning political parties and public organizations and Law 21/1924 regarding associations and foundations. The development of civil society has been strengthened in recent years due to financial, logistical and technical support from international foundations. NGOs became increasingly involved in advocating human rights and reforming public policies and legislation, offering alternative models for social services, and responding to needs not yet met by state policies and resources.

Among the beneficiaries of NGO programs are local public administrations, which depend on the competence and experience of local political actors to make use of existing and potential resources. Nongovernmental organizations provide services that the local government cannot, either due to lack of funds or because they are not permitted by law to do so; NGOs can obtain funding from donor organizations and/or from the local budget (according to the Law on Local Public Finance 189/1998).

However, funding is unevenly distributed to NGOs or inconsistently managed by them, as they find themselves unable to develop full-scale programs due to the same set of difficulties arising from lack of resources or insufficient networking.

Over the last few years important steps have been taken, particularly through the adoption of legislation on the *freedom of access to public information and on public participation in the process of decision-making* (Law 544/2001 and 52/2003).

The following period has shown that the Law, by itself, is not sufficient to solve the problem.

A series of reports issued by NGOs that are acting in the area of democracy and human rights (The Association for Human Rights Protection – Helsinki Committee, Transparency International Romania, The Romanian Academic Society, Pro Democracy Association) reveal the fact that the mentality of many public servants and even some elected representatives decreased the degree to which this Law was acknowledged and understood at the level of public institutions. In a monitoring study that the Pro-Democracy Association undertook between December 2002 – December 2003 out of a total of 957 petitions addressed to the public authorities (according to the provisions of Law 544/2001) only 400 of them received complete answers (42%).

Law 215/2001 was revised to Law 141/ 2004, the *Local Public Administration Law*. For the public administration sector in Romania, using the capacities of the NGOs would represent an opportunity by means of complementarity, or by using the project-based financing technique; thus, instead of maintaining their own units that provide social service on high expenses and large personnel, financing some specialized NGOs based on good projects would be more efficient. As a result, increasing credibility and sustainability of NGOs is proportional to entering and engaging partnership with the public administration.

Government Decree 1354/2005 set up the legal framework for the College for Civil Society Consultation, ushering in a new opportunity for infrastructure development which to facilitate communication and cooperation, in helpful addition to the Governmental Decree 775/2005, which regulated the development of procedures on elaboration, monitoring and evaluation of public policies at the national level.

3. Normativity and actual practice of partnership in a public policy context

Local or central Governments or organizations search for partners who share objectives for a specific public purpose in order to decide in favour of shared governance. Challenges faced range from *lack of clarity in defining common goals; complexity of accountability structures* (accountability between constituents and partners, between partners themselves, and between partners and their respective taxpayers); *capacity to provide an appropriate level of resources; capacity to use performance measurements (and managing horizontality); and importance of strong leadership and trust* (OAGC, 1999; OECD, 2001). The governance structure provides a framework within which partners make *strategic decisions* (in relation to the partnership objectives), *organizational decisions* (regarding the use of financial and non-financial resources), and *operational decisions* (regarding the delivery of the partnership's outputs).

Even though an agreement is signed, there are other aspects to partnership that remain of tacit clause or unsettled, such as conflict of interest resolution. Because of this incompleteness, “two assumptions - bounded rationality and opportunism - directly impact the results of partnerships”. This definition might apply to a good range of partnerships, such as (and not limited to) private-public partnerships, NGO-NGO partnerships, government-NGO partnerships, government-government partnerships, and state-county-municipal partnerships. Assessing partnership implies determining *optimal use of limited resources in a world with never-ending needs* – this complex system requires a careful blend of theory and method, and evidence-based evaluation. Evaluation has to rely on studying conditions of the *hybrid nature* of the partnership itself, which *mixes formal and informal elements into its governance* (OECD, 2001).

Theories of change can enable evaluation to accommodate assessment of multi-sector activities, address the relationship between process and outcomes, and deal with change at individual, organizational, and system levels; using an appropriate theory of change also enables a better grasp of the micro-institutional elements affecting partnership performance, and this is what the logic of transaction cost economics may provide in future studies: an understanding of alternative forms of economic organization and contractual arrangements, such as public-private partnerships.

4. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

ABRIDGED METHODOLOGICAL REFERENCES:

The methods of research and analysis tools: Theory-based hypotheses; focus groups questionnaires and semi-structured interviews; collected data analysis; workshops; public hearings.

Investigation Techniques: Questionnaires – 17 questions for NGO representatives, and 31 questions for local public administration representatives.

Interviewees in case-areas of study: 6 LPA representatives from 3 different communities (towns); a focus group formed by 6 persons, together with 4 representatives of NGOs.

Analyses reflect on: any documents, legislation that regulate the relationship in between NGOs and local governments, taking into account the local/national context (decisions of the local governments regarding NGOs direct relationships with them, resolutions passed by the local governments and contracts regulating the scope and content of the partnership with the NGOs).

Interview Operators: interview-specialized crew (2).

Span of time for data collection: 15th of August – 20th of November 2008

Span of time for data analysis: 21st of September – 30th of January 2009

Hours reserved for interviews: approx. 6 hours

Investigative objectives were directed at weighing up the quality of LPA-NGO rapports while measuring the intensity of civil society engagement in community development actions. Research was carried out in three communities located in Gorj County: Târgu Jiu, Tismana and Rovinari.

The primary analysis of the NGO sector provided a straightforward evaluation of the number of partnerships, with success or failure history, as well as a marking of active and inactive NGOs, and to no avail, there was quick proof that local civil society lacked coherent organization and dynamics, and had no recognizable networking expandability. The relatively small number of active CSOs allowed for an unexpectedly swift and unmediated contact with their representatives without prior sampling necessary. This first step in approaching the relevant factors had determined a slight change in methodological tools, in that it was consequently decided to substitute sampling procedures for focus group interviews since the majority of NGO representatives were willing to participate. Quantitative methods were largely replaced with qualitative ones, in the form of semi-structured interviews justified by an intent to obtain consistent and relevant pieces of information in the context of NGO perspectives heterogeneity. To have applied methodology with greater rigidity would have influenced or even compromised the quality of information and, perhaps, would have also marginalized particular experiences of each NGO by means of imposing artificial limitations on inter-subjective accounts, personal interpretations of events and values and scope of interaction.

Successive insertion of topics for discussion spurred interest in debate, into a free comment discursivity permissive of partnership experience and attitude sharing. Civil society group interviews exposed the fact that each NGO representative knew all the others, which was explained by resort to dimensions of civil society in a rather small municipality. The accuracy of collected data was further probed by questionnaires, and a particular set of questions was addressed to LPA officials as well. Mayors, Local Council members and managers in LPA structures answered issues with regard to public-private partnership when asked to add details about objective completion in public policy processes. Contexts of different kind became apparent, and a surprising variety of partnership rapports were exemplified, which invited in utility of further research.

A single methodological instrument would have proved worthless in attempting to apply comparison to communities, as their degree of difference ranged across sectors. Quantitative methods were set aside as provisional because they produced some superficial data which took no notice of local cultural conditions and specificity. A readjustment was in place in order to capture the sensible reality of these communities and the following sections of the study will show how this was assessed, from prognosis to analysis, and from evidence to alternatives and future possibilities.

5. DIRECTIONS OF RESEARCH AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

Hypotheses to corroborate findings refer to the following framework:

Structure of partnership. *Power relations* are viewed according to criteria such as strengths and weaknesses, political authority versus democratic or civic legitimacy, restrictive control versus collaboration relationships, and autonomy of interests versus monopoly over public policy strategies. *History and maturity* of partnerships reflect on previous experiences, on the rate of success, type of relations, and range of partners involved (quantitative and qualitative sets of indicators).

It is only natural for social partners to enter a system of mutual monitoring which leads to questions of *trust* regarding convention of association, or amongst partners. *Communication* and *contacts* play an important role in enhancing *expertise*, and in networking channels for joint planning and operationalization which may lead to *improved capacities* to access funds (outside finances or in-kind contribution) and lower transaction and mobility costs.

The external environment of partnership comprises economic (private-public sector interaction), political (local and central government stability in addressing change and clientelistic risks), cultural (ethnic kind, or homogeneity versus multiculturalism) and legislative coordinates.

There are formal requirements for partnerships under national or local regulations to aid the evolution of local policy context by switching emphasis from state-local interplay of action to LPA-NGO common grounds. Legislation such as the *Freedom of Information Act and the Free Access to Public Information Law* (L544/2001), or of the *Local and Central Public Administration Transparency in Decision-Making Act* (L52/2003), by means of normative act, positively open possibilities for a sound growth of civil society.

Values of partnership regard *structural change*, with its modified regulations and alternation of practices. *Innovation development* may ensue to meet expectations and convergence of interests by means of *transparent* and *legitimate* activities based on an increased *accountability* of local governments toward the local constituencies. Lack of sanctions on LPA level staff for a flawed management of public interest has subsided; local partnerships present the additional advantage of elaborate evaluation of LPA actions and grant CSOs and communities greater freedom in engaging initiatives by freely contributing to public policies.

The impact of partnership is determined by means of *public agenda setting*, *public policy implementation*, *monitoring* and *evaluation*. Meeting societal needs works to the benefit of *empowering citizens* to access decision-making and joining civil society organizations, which has an overall effect on *local programme efficiency* on its course to *best practices effectiveness*. Public-private partnerships are multi-tasking across existing benchmarking systems in ensuring a proactive management of human, material, and financial resources.

A *SWOT* model of analysis could easily fit into this framework, referenced by all the variables involved, yet bearing a few particularities: strengths and weaknesses of partnership, internal as well as external, are rather part of the descriptive coordinate of the study, documented in retrospect, as they become apparent from past experience and present; a slightly modified model of analysis is made responsible for the projective dimension of partnership potential – threats, opportunities, expectations (TOE), as these reflect on a rather inter-subjective account of considered rapports. The analytic construction is one of counter-weights, i.e. the strength of networking abilities versus the weakness of funding scarcity preventing regional cooperation; the synthetic composition is one of virtualities, i.e. comparing opportunity likelihood to mitigate threats and risks, i.e. partnerships should prompt interests of media, universities, and businesses to remedy the low receptiveness for cooperation/partnership projects, or in view of good practices publicity.

6. A study of three communities

6.1. Târgu Jiu Municipality, Capital City of Gorj County, is the proud beneficiary of a coherently structured civil society, with many well-represented youth organizations on rising trend in both *involvement* and *public recognition*. Moreover, the NGO sector portfolio is filled with completed projects and partnerships with the local public administration (LPA), in which there is considerable promotion for youth participation in a more than consultative form of common action. This kind of inter-organizational joint achievement is actually taking place in the context of a self-sufficient level of experience gained by LPA structures to carry out such projects on their own, without soliciting any collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs); in this particular case, LPA representatives willingness or even drive to seek partnership with NGOs is all the more fortunate and of positive impact for the benefit of satisfying local community needs.

LPA-NGO Rapports Specificity. Representatives of NGOs active in Târgu Jiu are rather in agreement that LPA structures are benevolent toward partnership and highly regard LPA orientation in compromising their functional independence in community projects activity in favour of pursuing an equally shared interest of common goal. Nevertheless, this has not always come as fact. For the first evaluation stages of mutual “probing”, NGOs were quite frustrated with the way in which local public institutions had a tendency to over-formalize common action to impart on the administrative center of gravity as preeminent source in conducting tangible project development. The projection and arrangement of partnership as devised by LPA authorities for publicity was, indeed, professional, yet it lacked the casing of a common effort present in the process, a shortcoming that would announce a frail start for NGOs in reaching initial objectives. In the ever-pressing incidence of a risk described as “capitalizing (own) merit on partner's initiative and labour”, the history of LPA-NGO partnership in Târgu Jiu had, as it would be fair to assume in such circumstances, humble beginnings. Since then, this particular type of association has passed the 5-year critical mark, a period during which LPA structures (Mayoral Office and Local Council/Township) developed sound institutional dynamics open to NGO participation in order to better serve priority objectives by means of adequate public action. There is evidence of significant cooperation and considerable improvement in LPA-NGO rapports, as expressed by both sides involved in the process.

NGO Diversity and Challenges. With respect to the internal complexity of the NGO sector, apart from relations with LPA structures, challenges obstructing a comprehensive, societal level development strategy were frequently mentioned; while NGO-LPA partnerships tread on an evolutionary path, intra-NGO sector cooperation seems to have become fragmented. Most likely, as respondents claim, this state of affairs is due to a difficulty faced when attempting to deal with financial (cost-related, grants and investment) issues which may counter-productively lead to a sort of “atomization” of activities between *different NGOs part of the same local civil society*. An indication of this condition, with several examples available, is the fact that *competition overruns collaboration* in the struggle to enhance the expertise of one's own organization and in vying to access as many projects and financing resources as possible.

While perfectly valid for an exclusively institutional logic, these priorities corrode the fabric of the associative environment necessary for generating an operatively *inclusive medium* of shared objectives in common action. NGO representatives admit to the reality of perverted effects resulting from resource scarcity or even “outage”, translating to a dramatically limited scope for feats in community interests.

In this context, *diversity itself may appear at first as a challenge*. Diversity is often considered an end in its own right, and for democratic and multi-cultural purposes, the strength of civil society is also a principled game of numbers. Nevertheless, for as far as diversity goes, numerous NGOs do not necessarily tell of numerous staff for each of them, as many NGO representatives have already acknowledged. NGO recruitment is fundamentally based on a voluntary basis, according to personal enthusiasm, and there are quite a few willing to join, but it is mainly because of less appealing financial terms that the quantitative levels are not followed by the qualitative requisites, a process which may impede the integration of more specialized personnel.

But there is another way, of a slower pace, to concentrate expertise in an organization, and that is *in-house training*, to which all new members aspire as a means to become useful to the community. This is exactly the case for NGOs and their staff in Târgu Jiu – self-involvement and personal will to contribute to the future development of community welfare and to the betterment of living standards are key coordinates for the further expansion of civil society networks, which is optimistically and in fact due to take place. NGO representatives recognize the need to attract economic agents to community causes and publicly ask for support in planning and organizing the development of the entire region of the county; a positive feedback, they say, can only lead to a proliferation of civil society organizations rallying to aid communities, and gradually, the more aware they become of the opportunities to evolve, the more open they shall be in deciding to approach and elaborate community projects in networks of NGOs.

The kind of stable cooperation required prompts roles of social importance which should never be “enslaved” by any other institutional logic or “outside” bureaucracy – the conclusion which resonates best with community interests. This comes across as a serious argument in relation to the level of *good practices* within communities, as a series of interviews have made it clear that there is a severe discrepancy between LPA institutional capacities to work with NGOs (ranking high), and civil society capacity and ability to coalesce into the same objectives (lagging behind); LPA authorities take pride in this advantage, and encourage NGOs to strive and reach the common-sense agreement – NGO representatives accept this constructive criticism. After all, greater autonomy overall (financial as well), conducive of empowerment, might be attained when *assumed collectively* by all those involved; similarly, extensive cooperation produces inter-dependence and mutual respect beyond provisional guarantees of impartial action, thus curbing the frequency of occurrences when there is too much constraint or discretionary power (regardless of electoral cycles) coming (intentionally or not) from administrative bureaucracy.

The LPA in Târgu Jiu is well organized throughout specialized departments and professionally staffed to manage a very confident public image to interface institutional structures. One of the main criticisms voiced by NGO representatives is that interaction with LPA structures is often stressful and demanding of those soliciting services by means of direct contact. In spite of an elaborate network of on-line public financing availability and expert commissions set up for the specific purpose of facilitating cooperation between the Mayor's Office and NGOs, these channels are not fully optimized to meet NGO needs, their representatives contend.

After all, NGOs find it rather difficult to secure own permanent resources while maintaining independence, integrity and a constructively critical posture. NGO diversity stimulates competition as well as initially obscuring the mutual benefits of a purposefully united front. LPA officials go on record saying that a union of sorts between NGOs would prove more appropriate for partnership than individually considered rapports. NGO representatives consent, yet warn of a *double standard* surfacing from impositions planted by the institutional logic of LPA structures when coping with *selection* and *eligibility criteria* for partnership.

On the other hand, a powerful civil society forum of action, made up by diverse yet ends-convergent NGOs, would put an end to the lack of coordination between human and financial resources and to the shortcomings resulting from unrecognized, isolated or fragmented initiatives arbitrarily taken out of primary objectives.

Human resources employed by LPA structures in Târgu Jiu gain the significant advantage of having been professionally specialized over the rather latent training of NGO staff to meet the function of diversifying competences. Material resources play a decisive part in bringing up the relevant human resources, and as declared by both sides, there are estimated clear differences between LPA and NGO capacities and financial resources. LPA authorities reservedly acknowledge that there may be balance brought about by NGO to the functional rationale of LPA structures in designing community development. Satisfaction levels with partnership score average, but this is just a subjective, and often polite (not willing to disturb relations), reflection on actual partnership which can certainly be improved to the matter of fact.

There are several topics of discontent which need to be addressed by both sides, yet actually uttered public protest or disgruntlement has a strange way of back-firing by marginalizing the issuing source and provoking a blaming game with parties against which criticism was directed. For instance, NGO representatives credit LPA officials with an affirmative will to enter partnerships, but also consider that there is ulterior or premeditated motive on behalf of LPA procedures, in that partnerships are somewhat formal and instrumental only to the acclaim of LPA structures public image, translated in openness, transparency, communication availability, or drive to forge pacts with civil society. The “only for show” scenario, or self-centred assembly of good practices agenda in a documented history of experience to further justify public action in order to gain entitlement authority and legitimacy by consolidating public trust, is completely denied by LPA officials; surprisingly, they completely defy an open dispute on the issue, probably for fear of damaging own image or of attracting unwanted doubts upon trustworthiness in project partnership. Nevertheless, LPA officials would never afford to openly criticize NGOs as this would mean losing the vital appreciation of the local community, a sacrifice that would compromise LPA stature and commit to grave errors in practicing responsibility. Conversely, LPA representatives only partially contest that projects chosen for partnership are lighter weight, that some NGOs are more workable (annexations, really) to own structure dynamics and institutional logic (and in partnership efficiency), or that such common actions could have easily been carried out by LPA structures alone. This LPA “fuzzy” courtesy of letting NGOs in on publicity (making examples of partners and partnerships for return appraisal stunts) spurs controversy and does not really suit the needs of a growing NGO sector. Perhaps NGOs should look beyond regional and national borders for financial support in order to acquire autonomy, and self-sustainability, imperative for reaching at least equal status in rapports with the publicly-funded LPA.

6.2. The Town of Tismana represents a fine example of NGO good practices. NGO initiatives are autonomous and self-referenced leading to a situation of *parallelism* with LPA actions: concomitance of enterprises without causal relation or interactive cooperation between the two. This means that LPA-NGO rapports are tensioned by a tendency to destabilize partnership; LPA structures and NGOs are rather competing for the *same social space of objectives*, as documented by their recent history. A scenario for *zero-sum game* is certainly at odds with the “win-win” tenet of partnership; yet, these circumstances of local dissension between the LPA and NGOs owe their contested nature to the nonexistence of short, medium and long-term strategies for prioritizing community objectives, to a very large extent.

LPA-NGO Rapports Specificity. Perspectives exemplified during interviews have shown that there are *different interpretations of the same objectives*, and both sides concur in this respect. Tourism, with integrated local resources, seems to be the main target for LPA and NGO maps and tables, deploying an object of aspiration in the shape of a *Gordian knot* for community development, in that this intricate challenge may be solved either by an interplay from all ends or by cutting straight down the middle.

Both LPA and NGO representatives realize that the stakes are high and claim own right to untie/cut the knot; nevertheless, expertise and capacities differ once again, only to find that this time it is the NGO staff who wield the authority of superior expertise in linking local tourist specificity with the cultural domain in a competent promotional programme. The economically significant social capital of this town is in the custody of civil society, and despite the fact that LPA officials now confirm NGO primacy in actively formulating social and economic plans for community “revival”, they still maintain a peculiar stubbornness to externalize several public services.

The inflexibility to become jointly integrated in view of devising a practicable stratagem for community development tells of LPA intention to organize local growth independently of (or in competition with) NGO input, which turns out to actually hinder private initiative in building up tourism infrastructure. In order to describe this situation, one representative of a local NGO asserts his view that lack of engagement on behalf of LPA authorities to come up with a *town brand* has delayed the fine design of local community architecture by at least 10 years.

As skeptical as it is, this statement is rather difficult to rebut, when considering the statistics of local employment structures – most of the inhabitants work in the field of agriculture (while some 40%, according to Mayor's estimates, still depend on state aid for heating during the winter). Civil society opposition to stalemated development is characterized by an emphasis on human resource employment in cultural, religious, leisure, or spa tourism; a major drawback to achieving this line of development, as suggested by NGO representatives themselves, is that the much needed human resources for this type of activity in community interest are to be found outside LPA structures, which makes it awkward to place them in direct connection.

There is also proof of another inconsistency in what concerns those who hold the expertise necessary for motivating community development; in spite of having outstanding personal or group achievements to their merit and experience, they are apparently disengaged from the actual life of the local community. NGO representatives stress the unfortunate event of *political marginalization* which brings about *community detachment and isolation*; that is to say that capable intellectuals who had gained wide-range competences useful to the community are removed by means of electoral discourse by better promise-equipped politicians – this is the reason why there is a commonly shared view across local civil society that political affiliation and activism do not bode well with social activism of non-governmental kind in meeting community demands. *Distrust* based on political difference of ideology is mentioned quite literally as adversity blocking channels of communication between civil society and LPA structures.

From what is learnt by means of interview, there is further distinction based on actions affecting electoral interest: endorsement of cultural initiatives alongside youth promotion programmes are freely embraced as LPA priorities, which is not to say about economy-related propositions as these are obstructed and mocked at in preliminary stages for fear that they might dissolve the electoral composition of the region. Another piece of information pinpointed by NGO representatives is that the electorate itself also bears weak coordinates in support of partnerships – despite it being, administratively-speaking, a town, Tismana remains socially and culturally a rural community. Then again, this is just a singled-out instance of a locality in Romania amongst many others confronted with the same problem. In attempting to remedy this situation, LPA officials in Tismana have resorted to compromise by employing positions of *cultural delegates* to the community, although to little effect (no special training, but politically convenient). In these circumstances there is only formal collaboration or mutual disregard between NGOs and LPA structures, registering minor impact on the development of the local community. A viable solution should come from local actors agreement; yet interviews expose substantial divergence of perspectives on the issue of NGO roles in public life: on the one hand, NGO representatives choose *complementarity*, while on the other hand, the Town Mayor prefers *cooperation*. Complementarity is a committed option for those who wish to retain organizational identity and integrity, whereas cooperation is provisional under common act ordained by the selectivity of shared interest; maximum efficiency of partnership should be somewhere in-between, in delicate balance.

Tismana comes across as a town-case with faulty practice at LPA level: widespread poverty, risks of rampant unemployment, unsuitable infrastructure, and a lack of research into local development alternatives corroborated with inappropriate means to community aid and defective rapport with civil society at large, indicate a less likely to succeed trajectory, democracy- and development-wise, if upheld in the same manner as up to the present moment. Round-table talks have been proposed, but overlooked ever so often that both sides lost will to face each other in an effort to rebuild community identity.

LPA structures have to learn, NGO representatives state, that civil society is *democratically supposed* to challenge LPA resolutions deemed unbecoming to the community, and that protest is only natural to this process – this means that it should not jeopardize any chance of present accord or any prospect of future partnership in better addressing community priorities. The LPA-NGO competition should find its course in *compromising for stability*, not in *destructuring (the coherence of) community development*.

Political competition in Tismana finds resounding equation in civil society as well. LPA structures consider it appropriate to hold monopoly over public action sometimes even at the expense of transparency in communicating with the community; local council orders of debate and resolutions are seldom made public, while petitions and requests of right to solicit and use information (on the basis of Law 544) are frequently not answered in legal term.

The Mayor assumes a diplomatic position in commenting LPA-NGO rapports but there is considerable evidence to a difference in motivation regarding own scope of activity between the two sides. In the absence of medium- and long-term development strategies, LPA activity appears as chaotic, determining frustrated NGOs to remain uninvolved: the LPA in Tismana rather tends to be a local structure for social aid distribution supporting the less fortunate, than assuming the role of primary promoter for major aedileship. NGO representatives argue that the LPA in Tismana disregards, to a very large extent, both initiatives originating in civil society and opportunities in accessing E.U. funds.

The rebuffing of a project meant to offer assistance to the local Roma population is ill-matched by the refusal to participate in co-financed projects in partnership with NGOs which would bring in E.U. funds (a reasonable 10%-20% co-financing of local interest operation achievement is rejected in favour of the less than logical alternative of complete financing). Civic input is inconsequential – it shows no evidence of bearing some correspondence to retaliatory capacity and is only mildly polarized; population support is rather passive when it comes to endorsing public action initiated by the expertise-challenged LPA that has political power management reserved for electoral tactics.

Common objectives are therefore completed later than in due time, development is delayed, while the local community lacks social progress of full-range coordinated action.

6.3. The Town of Rovinari has a very low level of civil society organization, and therefore, collaboration has to be done with NGOs located outside this town but active here as well. Interaction between LPA structures and CSOs may be infrequent, yet there is one case to show for future availability in extent. LPA-NGO rapports are set to a positive trend, as representatives of the only NGO present in Rovinari declare; their office is located inside the Mayor's building, facilitating close-quarter constructive activity and communication (rather than the opposite), while the main objective they are commonly involved in centres on a PHARE-funded project concerning “Active measures for labour force employment”.

LPA structures in Rovinari will have to compensate for the lack of a developed NGO sector by outwardly seeking collaboration and inviting initiative. Moreover, the new town leadership pursued partnerships with LPA management units from abroad, namely in twinning relations with Turek, a town in Poland, with a similar social and economic profile and work-force distribution (mining). The official twinning act may spur interest over particular social domains and even generate international public-private partnerships or thematic NGO emergence (specific to priorities assessed by predominantly mining communities).

LPA solicitude in view of this research ranks high, in spite of a modest history of partnerships with civil society, and cannot be blamed for the low levels of association as there is verified evidence that the local management could use the help and expertise of NGOs; further growth of this sector is eagerly expected, even though in the short-run both opportunities and alternatives seem limited. Nevertheless, the Mayor exhibits an affirmative reaction when asked to weigh up initiatives meant to civically educate town youth into beneficial volunteerism for community action. Socially coordinated latent participation, recruitment and training could later form the much needed basis for organizing civil society and locally specific, incipient NGO cells.

6.4. Three communities, three scenarios for partnership – symbolic renditions

I. The LPA in Târgu Jiu enters bicephalous relations with different NGOs, but different NGOs in their own sector resemble a multi-headed creature that has neither awareness nor definite control over its own body. A better grasp of own mass volumetry and of bodily functions, in addition to 'inter-head' trust, allows more in-depth judgment and extended ability in greater thematic scope of wide-range activities with fully assumed responsibility. 'Inter-head' miscommunication should quietly cease and vacate channels for constructive interconnectedness roominess to enter, unless discontinuation is provoked by LPA mechanisms (which should not be the case). The noble bicephalous emblem is the ideal aim of partnership; this is why LPA-NGO rapports must not be a question of mechanism versus live creature.

II. There are, nevertheless, loose ends to the “Gordian knot” present in Tismana rapports between LPA and NGOs. LPA authorities prefer following own thread (perspective) to eventually untie the knot and claim recognition over this achievement. At the other end, NGOs see the urgency of cutting the knot straight away so as to relieve strains on LPA-NGO rapports. NGO representatives suggest that if there's option to untie from loose ends, for estimating chances of success it is very important to know the identity of the LPA political authority holding the loose end. LPA officials voice unrequited fear that the knot is not of their own doing: NGO presence is charged with tangling the threads of community development by rivalling the most entitled and legitimate structure (self-reflected) to handle such matters, that is, the LPA. Cutting the “knot” of community development, or severing contact between LPA and NGOs may irreparably damage collective interest for community action. Starting from different loose ends may prove alternatively constructive – it may just be that there is only one thread that makes up the knot; this process in itself could turn immensely valuable, regardless of whether what they find in their hands is the exact same thread or a different one: the end-result of actually untying the knot is reached.

III. In Rovinari there is claim that there is no evidence of an *invisible hand* to come to partnership aid. Of course, the claim is right: some say they don't see it (obviously), others say there is no such thing (completely unprepared or detached). Simply put, it becomes visible when you shake it. Drive for development has a particular way of harmonizing different interests, and Adam Smith knew it well. Despite having different individual or institutional perspectives, complementarity of objectives can be attained if sharing the same environment of motivation: development. Development itself, if properly nurtured, returns in the shape of an invisible hand to aid all forms of partnership.

Overall, in dealing with LPA-NGO rapports, as when dealing with mankind ontology and teleology, it is the principles of good-will, kind respect, and mutual support that represent the pinnacle of humanity. An ancient allegory imparts wisdom in this sense: if we imagine the entire human race as sitting at a table to eat and each finds that the cutlery he/she has been given is too long to manoeuver in actually getting the food from own plate to self, what should be decided?

Would you use the length of the tools to grab food from someone else's plate or resort to more altruistic measures? Light is shed on this situation: each ought to be fed by another and feed others with own tools; the alternative of taking someone else's food is doomed to failure as there still is distance to be dealt with in trying to bring the food back to own self.

Reread to fit this context, the moral is self-evident: (only) by servicing others you service yourself – it goes without saying that this applies to the whole range of human activities, including the relations analyzed here.

7. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH DATA – Community-specific findings

The survey which took place in 3 different communities yielded mainly anticipated results and a few conflicting or surprising outcomes; challenges are mentioned to fairly sizable detail as they establish common denominating grounds for pertinent observations which reach out toward recommendations for both LPA structures and NGO sector. Framework and structure of analysis follow the items and variables set up in the hypothesis, namely ***nature, purpose, values and impact of partnership***.

Results anticipated in thesis and confirmed by means of research. The formal ties between LPAs and NGOs reflect, from both sides, the will and aspiration for more harmonious communication and cooperation and the expansion of existing mutual support. **LPA public agendas encompassing community development projects require, even if not publicly admitted by LPAs, civil society organizations' input.** As expected, *larger cities concentrate the better-equipped administrative staff with a considerably higher level of expertise, experience, and networking abilities, ranking much higher in comparison to the smaller localities and with regard to the number of civil society collaboration projects.* There is also an uneven balance between LPAs and NGOs as a result of differentiated material and financial resources access and availability (in favour of LPAs) and, sometimes, of the quality of human resources (in favour of NGOs); LPAs reluctantly and quite seldom agree to finance NGO activities with common aims, whereas NGO specialized staff will not work pro bono to the credit of LPA representatives alone.

The lesson here is that neither side should be treated as an appendix of the other, but rather as full partner with inalienable rights and merit-proportional benefits. *Effective partnership is thus incipient, with the NGO sector rather below the organizational level and capacity of LPAs.*

Unanticipated results in research findings. *Despite the fact that larger communities are well situated in relation to the diversity of the NGO sector, the local public administration representatives seem to be dissatisfied with the lack of unity among NGOs, which may explain a certain air of superiority about the public administration in treating some NGOs as not fully fledged, not thoroughly or coherently organized, and thus preferring certain associations at the expense of others.*

The local bureaucracy appears to have channelled and tapped into a steady resource of communication with certain types of NGOs which meet the selection/eligibility criteria for cooperation which translate to common intents and purposes on the agenda, as precondition, and a more flexible or unilaterally adaptable position on behalf of NGOs in negotiating terms with the LPA institutional logic (which is rigid) and dynamics (of circular kind). This may foretell of two distinct directions: the future consolidation of relations between eligible-for-collaboration NGOs and LPAs; or, this may also indicate that out-filtered NGOs could unfortunately be furthermore precluded from entering contractual cooperation. There is also proof that LPAs dislike or do not intuitively come across the need to adapt themselves as a mutual condition of partnership, as shown by a resilient reluctance to accept change coming from the private sector or bearing its respective pattern of functioning.

Challenges faced by LPAs in meeting the demands for partnership. *The purpose of LPA activity ranges from financial resources access-pooling, accumulation to fair distribution in promoting public interest projects. The actual practice and institutional limit are matter of controversy: even intra-LPA interests clash under conditions of an erratic “supply” of funds, which is often due to a difference (or competition, adversity) in political affiliation and representation between local administration officials and governmental offices deciding the volume and direction of the capital to be invested.*

Challenges faced by NGOs in meeting the demands for partnership. NGO purpose of activity regards the extension, amplification and consolidation of civil society networks to the benefit of community development. There is a *demographic limit* to its propensity, however: smaller localities present even more challenges in this respect, and the smaller the area of reference the more frustrated and polarized LPA and civil society seem to be, as their scope of interaction is limited.

The *constitutive reality* of these challenges portrays a civil society that is either incipient, slightly vocal or completely absent, depending proportionally on the size of the locality. Political affiliation (translated as irreconcilable adversity) dictates whether entire segments of the civil society withdraw from consultations and reject association with LPA representatives and their proposed projects (a sort of dissociation which aids in better retort with the next electoral cycle); LPAs respond, in view of partnership consultation sides and decision-making sharing processes: some social actors are welcomingly short-listed, while others are inevitably black-listed.

PROBLEMATIC SPECIFICITY OBSERVATIONS. Strangely enough, both LPA and NGO sector representatives leave the impression that there might be need for an additional agency (!) which to intermeditate between LPAs and NGOs, and which to make their interests converge, or at least, compatible (an agency in perspective-matching and monitoring capacity). Whereas LPAs and the general public tend to be somewhat skeptical or suspicious of NGO merits, NGOs stress reservation regarding LPA efficiency, on account of their inferred political bias, half-visible agendas; LPA characterize some NGOs by clear intent to put institutional resources or mechanisms at risk, discrediting LPA image or undermining their authority, but the same can be said about NGO hesitation or distrust of LPA representatives.

This is due to political affiliations facilitated rather via informal channels of communications, or for fear of LPA representatives gaining political capital for projects which target communities at large and conceptually originate within civil society organizations; these drawbacks generate a “double standard” of treatment or a misidentified legitimate authority acting responsibly in community interests.

As resulting from the data collected and analyzed, in order for NGOs to become more consolidated in countering possible LPA abuses of authority and in balancing bureaucracy with a clearly defined project to benefit society at large, it is necessary to implement legal “safety nets” for all civil society organizations, starting with the material and financial coordinates, so as to ensure partnership conditions.

The constant struggle for a monopoly over the public sphere leaves little room for negotiated partnership; different motivations generate less coherent programmes and inhibit development, and the lack of results further impedes an otherwise infrequent communication. Expertise infusion is needed within LPAs, and until availability and transparency for cooperation become non-dissimulated, public support will not prevail, and the NGO sector will remain insignificant. There is a lack of transparency in the process of developing partnership – from selecting collaborators and measurement scales, ongoing negotiation and policy implementation, to determining effects and interpreting outcomes. Local initiatives in legislation are quite infrequently monitored by the NGO sector. NGO organization and structure revolve around the most easily accessible or ready-available source of finance instead of being centred on community interest. Issues of allocation shortage will persist for as long as capacities shall differ in terms of resource availability and mobility.

Both LPA and NGO projected objectives and planned strategies in view of development lack the strength of integrating the significant element of cultural specificity to the relevant community. Due to the culture-wise conceptual remoteness between the priorities of the local community, LPA strategic agendas and NGO development projects, there is little support for and participation in the processes of public initiative for policy need and design and of prior discursive action in consultations and negotiations between the public and the private. The complex institutional build-up of traditional norms and rules are seldom part of development strategies, not to mention considering counter-issues of institutional practice in “path-dependency” and viable alternatives.

Issues of competence are met with issues of autonomy and lack of hierarchization and with the often vicious circle of juridical symmetry when authorities have less convergent or colliding interests, individually justified or caused by authority obstructions and frictions in the mechanisms of decision-making processes. Issues of accountability also arise from an ambiguous delimitation of domain competence, or due to competence intersection.

Redesigning competence structure and jurisdictional values to more efficiently approximate administrative roles and functions are necessary, along with the “simplification, systematization, normalization, and unification of public administration activity” as imperative measures at the basis of a reformed and improved administrative codification.

Partnerships and their conceptual and material benefits appear to be increasingly present within community awareness, especially in those fortunate cases where such value-assignment initiates from both local authorities and civil society, equating commitment for common good with rightful public recognition.

Recommendations for NGOs. Community development requires complementarity in public-private terms. We suggest, as a first measure of redress, the gradual but sustained and consistent penetration of these localities by a number of NGOs based in the County Capital which to open small offices and in the long run develop into more location-specific agencies, as identified by community objectives.

There is great opportunity for the crystalization of civil society organizations into an association of specialized interest groups via forums, or into “cluster” associations targeting specific domains, which to become more involved and more influential (numerous) within society so as to immediately open up official LPA channels; secondly, the continuous training and specialized assistance of NGO representatives advocating both greater financial independence from the public funds of LPAs indicate the need for a timely reorientation toward private donors financially contractual assistance. A more complex, inter-dependent practice of decision-making processes, shared between LPAs and NGOs, without subordinating one to the other, would comparatively improve partnership gains and community benefits. The county-based Associative Environment should assume the role of “watchdog” over inter-locking community objectives as well as the function of lobby-making, by becoming established as an institution of organization and representation at county level, in its own right.

Recommendations for LPAs. LPA representatives have suggested that effective decentralization would have been successful only if simultaneous with administrative body depolitization and in the context of non-overlapping competences of authority. Redesigning the administrative body may also imply rethinking its dimensions and authoritative scope of jurisdiction, in the future event of a thorough reconfiguration of territorial and administrative units.

A coherent reform of the administration and a revision of function complementarity become imperative if the adequate circumstances of partnership are to become reality, and not to remain mere rhetoric.

Shared LPA-NGO Recommendations. There is a recognized need for defining a county-level strategy for the period 2009-2012 concerning rapports between LPAs and the third sector, which to contain a series of measures and stages alongside strategic objectives. Among them, founding an institutional framework so as to regulate LPA-NGO relations, beyond LPA specific legislation (A *White Paper* for LPA-NGO relations); setting common grounds for an open debate forum reuniting LPA and NGOs; full range and scale association of civil society organizations in an interrelated network of issue-oriented theme groups. With the establishment of a Secretariat for the connection between LPAs and the third sector, attracting public and private resources in view of deploying a Local Development Fund within the Associative Environment will be more readily achieved and fairly monitored.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Projecting Values of Partnership to Purposefully Impact Community Development – Follow-Up Stages In View of Better Approaching LPA-NGO Partnership:

Data analysis resulting from a focus-group questionnaire addressed to civil society representatives has shown that the unanimously chosen foundational step in re-adjusting LPA-NGO relations is that the shared objective must become the durable development of the community.

The logical follow-up procedure would be the establishing and enactment of a common strategy for NGOs and LPAs to develop projects of public interest; this simply has to be done in conjunction with pinpointing and solving issues which have lately led to animosity between LPAs and NGOs. A pre-condition for equal status in partnership is supposed to include the determined decision of removing LPA arbitrary conditions or pressures upon NGOs, a situation commonly reported in association with project eligibility for financing. Among other preliminary measures, it is never sufficiently stressed that onset in such an endeavour requires, in the first place, the forging of a common terminology and a projective sense and meaning for the concepts of “association” and “partnership”.

LPA structures are not the only ones called into redress; NGOs have to reach a common agreement to stabilize their environment, and the answer appears with the much needed emergence of an integrated form of associative structure. This requires a setup for the functional framework of responsibilities, roles, modes of relating to community priorities and channels to transparently connect with LPA structures; a Directorate (Council) and an unambiguously elaborate statute would ensure the guidance necessary to coalesce approach methodologies in order to reach the complementary practice of common goals. It is indeed obvious that the Associative Environment of the NGO sector must be politically unaffiliated and free of political hierarchies; the “infrastructure” of the Associative Environment, from institutional statute to human resources, ought to be politically independent, and as much as possible, financially autonomous, not relying exclusively on funds from LPA structures. Concerning the scope of preoccupation, the NGO coalition should work toward “theme workshops”, generating public interest for “issue-specific” forums.

Continuous practice in this direction may add up to capacity enhancements: the Associative Structure could become a “mirror image” of LPA structures, in terms of dimensions and expertise – constantly training the NGO staff is necessary in this respect. The public and the private sectors should uninterruptedly interact across community issues; this the main reason why regulation of this interaction should always rely on a mutually-convened approach to community projects, turning out to be “bottom-up” in terms of priorities, and “grass-roots”-oriented in accommodating initiatives for consultation and negotiations – this is justified by the fundamental system of reference that is represented by the real needs of communities.

In order to remain up-to-date and keep up with these needs there is also a responsibility of continuous research of community environment in order to remove communication deficiencies in the process of facilitating input, and for optimally detecting the shift in alternating priorities within referential communities.

One method of addressing this is presented by the opportunity to develop an informational system, which should be seized along with managing the wide open publicity of all-round activity.

As a principle for comprehensively integrated inter-dependent activities, control and full visibility in the management of activity hold high ground, ranging from impact studies and planning, to implementation and action evaluation.

9. APPENDIX

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW TOPICS

- ◇ I. LPA policies and practice vis-à-vis NGOs
- ◇ II. LPA action transparency
- ◇ III. LPA actions availability within systems of public communication
- ◇ IV. Inclusive Policies toward NGOs
- ◇ V. Legislative Framework substance and coherence regarding stimulation of partnerships between LPAs and NGOs
- ◇ VI. Pinpointing difficulties in the processes specific to partnerships between LPAs and NGOs
- ◇ VII. Suggestions regarding the improvement of the legal framework and of the *legiferenda* climate
- ◇ VIII. Suggestions regarding further encouragement of a rise in the number of partnerships between LPAs and NGOs.
- ◇ IX. NGO public functions

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

- ◇ I. 1. Is NGO and civil society presence satisfying in the context of collaboration with public authorities? Please, explain.
- ◇ II. 2. How difficult is it to access information of public interest as facilitated by current legislation?
- ◇ II. 3. Is there sufficient time available in-between local project proposals for civil society representatives to develop a response strategy?
- ◇ II. 4. On a scale from 1 to 10, where would you place LPA actions transparency?
- ◇ III. 5. Have you ever been in possession of public documents (meeting or public session transcripts) by means of which you could evaluate the quality of decisions made regarding the life of the local community?
- ◇ III. 6. What is the public institutions' response frequency to your demands over periods of time (as guaranteed by law 52/2003)?
- ◇ III. 7. Were you ever in a situation (how often?) where you had to re-commence or bring further specifications to your needs or demands due to incomplete, evasive or even negative replies?
- ◇ IV. 8. Is your organization part of any consultative committee or collaboration commission in a partnership with local public authorities or institutions? Is your advice sought after when designing new projects aimed at the local community or must you inform yourselves, out of own initiative, in order to become involved?
- ◇ IV. 9., 10. To what extent would you call your collaboration with LPAs expensive? Please mention both from own experiences and other NGOs cases you are familiar with.
- ◇ V. 11. On a scale from 1 to 10, please indicate the quality of the current legislation, in what concerns public pervasiveness, from your perspective.
- ◇ V. 12. On a scale from 1 to 10, please consider the quality of partnerships between LPAs and NGOs. Elaborations are useful.
- ◇ VI. 13. In a scenario where you are confronted with a public institution representative, please formulate a critique you would address to the respective institution.
- ◇ VII. 14. Considering your statement for the previous question, please advance a suggestion regarding the improvement of the legislative framework.
- ◇ VIII. 15. What are the measures to be taken for civil society representatives and LPAs to increase the degree and number of partnerships?
- ◇ IX. 16. What is the gain of the local community benefiting from a well-developed NGO sector?
- ◇ IX. 17. Which are the main responsibilities that should be assumed by NGOs?

LPA REPRESENTATIVES QUESTIONNAIRE

- ◇ 1. How would you describe the legal framework enabling the collaboration between your institution and NGOs?
- ◇ 2. To what extent may NGOs influence the local public agenda?
- ◇ 3. What is the estimated number of local decision project proposals you have received from NGOs so far?
- ◇ 4. What is the specific domain of the most active NGOs you know of?
- ◇ 5. Considering the relatively short period of collaboration between your institution and NGOs, please comment on this relationship.
- ◇ 6. At the present moment, are local NGOs real partners in your type of activity? How would you measure previous partnerships, using a scale from 1 to 10?
- ◇ 7. Which are the most active NGOs in your area, for how long have they been your partners, and in which field of interest?
- ◇ 8. Which are the (preferred) means of communication with NGOs? **(Structure of partnership indicators)**
- ◇ 9. How many meetings have you organized in 2008, with NGOs present?
- ◇ 10. What was the nature of these meetings?
- ◇ 11. How many press conferences have you organized during this year in order to inform public opinion regarding projects about to be voted in the Local Council?
- ◇ 12. Is there an institutional strategy to promote and optimize dialogue and cooperation with NGOs? To what extent may NGOs participate in the construction of public policies?
- ◇ 13. In your opinion, how well-placed or, conversely, poor in quality, will NGOs be in five years' time, as compared to the current situation?
- ◇ 14. What are the financial costs associated with NGO cooperation?
- ◇ 15. How many projects were completely or partially financed by your institution and in which field of interest?
- ◇ 16. Are there any committees associated with your institution which include civil society representatives, so as to allow them to identify and design projects and solutions for community issues?
- ◇ 17. What are the top 5 issues on your work agenda? What is, on your list, the degree of priority assigned to developing cooperation with NGOs?
- ◇ 18. In what area of your activity would you prefer a more active presence of NGOs?
- 19. What is the number of public – private social partnerships, and which are the enterprises your institution has become traditional partners with?
- ◇ 20. Are there any programmes designed to cultivate civic education in younger citizens, so as to facilitate their embracing future responsibilities?
- ◇ 21. Just how beneficial would the opening of a public relations centre be, considering the enabling of permanent communication and feedback between your institution and different NGOs?
- ◇ 22. Have you ever launched any public appeal to civil society representatives in view of advancing community development projects and in what specific domains? **(Impact of partnership indicators)**
- ◇ 23. How would you quantify and weigh the various gains from cooperating with NGOs or private sector enterprises (financial profit, quality of life, GDP per capita)? **(Value of partnership indicators)**
- ◇ 24. Which are your expectations regarding civil society and NGOs for the future?
- ◇ 25. What would NGOs presume to expect of you for the future?
- ◇ 26. How would you define the rapport between NGOs and LPAs – of opposition, of cooperation, or of complementarity?
- ◇ 27. What are the risks and opportunities of collaborating with NGOs?
- ◇ 28. How should the NGO profile look like in order to improve chances of inclusion as actual partner for LPAs?
- ◇ 29. What seems to be the appropriate role for NGOs to play in local government and community development?
- ◇ 30. If you did choose NGO partners, please provide reasons for such a decision.
- ◇ 31. Could you select a few key-words to define the partnership with NGOs?

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INTER-STUDY RESEARCH CONGRUENCE

Congruence of the three studies (Croatian, Macedonian, Romanian) on the dimensions of LPA-NGO partnership is assessed by means of seeking similarity of findings, or their common denominators, under condition of adequately contextualized methodologies and measuring instruments. *Different cultural systems of reference* prompt distinct meanings to research scope and analysis relevance for each study; not only the area of incidence, but also the number of referenced communities differs, as well as their social, economic, political and cultural structures. *Semi-structured interviews* were conveniently chosen so as to suit research purposes that would allow for a richer cross-referential potential in view of a generally-valid consistency of data. Extension of scope captures diversity: for the Romanian case of Gorj County, communities investigated produced an *LPA dominant model* (Târgu Jiu) with serious chances of turning into a *collaborative model* (association preferred to acting independently), a *dual model* of autonomous courses of action (Tismana), and a too soon to be determined pattern of LPA-NGO rapports, which could turn into an *NGO dominant* partnership (Rovinari).

We have found that there is a somewhat common model for ideal partnership defined as “integrated dependency”, or *constructive interdependence*, which is to say that it must exhibit low levels of restrictive control, yet high levels of accountability, civil “constituency” support of partnership instead of an expanded, and thus costly, bureaucratic apparatus, and constantly communicating and inter-relating perspectives on reaching common objectives by means of an input-feedback based cooperation in designing community projects. Challenges continue to be present: networks of CSOs are yet to emerge in support of community structural priorities, decentralisation of the LPAs is still an issue, and there is consensus that more institutionalized relations should be approached in forging partnerships. Satisfaction with partnership varies greatly, and there still is room for improvement, even if scaling well above (national) average.

Contractually binding accords are in different stages of effect: a Charter of Cooperation has been signed by object-of-study town LPA and civil society organisations in Croatia, but this kind of convention is yet to appear and proliferate in Macedonia and Romania. To a more general note, LPA dominant models are factual due to a capacity feature legally reserved for LPA structures as governing assemblies and regulative bodies, namely a prerogative to initiate public policy in collaboration or independently, and in establishing whether decision-making processes are open to other social actors' propositions, or remain confined to own political and institutional will. For this reason, LPA standards have to be met, in spite of the fact that the respective institutional perspectives on matters of settling community priorities is not fully comprehensive, or at times, even disturbing. Expectations intensity surpasses satisfaction with partnership, while threats and opportunities are always cause for reference in relation to current weaknesses. Not dwelling on impossibilities posed by cultural relativity, there are certain mechanisms and institutional rapports that go beyond specificity and turn particularism to a more open perspective, promising a considerable degree of comparative relevance.

Research teams from the three countries are well aware of the limits present on sustainable correspondence between findings. Local particularities define community authenticity, and these uniquely interrelated coordinates produce a level of specificity which allows analogies only to a less than generic extent. This is not to say that comparisons are completely pointless; they offer insight in what the regional mosaic is supposed to offer in order to be better understood by more ample endeavours in such research.

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