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Where does success in local development come from?

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Where Does Success in Local Development Come from?

ERSA 2003 Jyväskylä, Finland

Young Scientist Session

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This paper presents the case study of City of Samobor in northern Croatia where participatory approach has been used in order to create a strategic development document.

At the end of 2001 few ambitious people from the City Board of City of Samobor expressed the will to prepare a strategic development program for the period of 10 years. The Institute of Economics from Zagreb offered its assistance in a participatory manner. In the beginning of 2002 the Development Board was established and started acting as a coordinating body. After public hearing ended, at the end of 2002 the City Council adopted the Program. The Institute of Economics provided methodological guidance and showed ability to manage the process without interference in decision making the main task of the City Board.

Following the principles of participative methodology the most relevant document for the development of a local community was created. In the first step the Development Board established four different groups whose task was to undertake the SWOT analysis. This very simple tool both, for those who undertake it and those who read it, in a simplified way shows strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to further development of the community. For the first time, the City Board of the City of Samobor was observing its city introspectively, noticing how the things really look like from the inside. The most difficult task was to grade how the City Board functions itself. To be enough objective to comment itself appears as kind of a burden for those who undertake the analysis, taking into consideration the fact that they will be exposed to criticism-positive and negative-coming from interest groups. After SWOT analysis had been undertaken, the Development Board prepared the workshop which purpose was to gather all the interest groups at one place and discuss the analysed materials. The

outcome of workshop was input to the most important part of the document - the list of necessary projects and measures to be done, and its' excerpt, the Operation plan - list of the tasks with the highest priority level.

The draft of the Strategic Development Program was adopted in the mid 2002 and passed to public hearing, the highest possible level of participation. The City Council adopted the draft in the beginning of December 2002, a year after the first preliminary discussions about the elaboration of this important document. The implementation phase, where the professionals rather than the Development Board will have to show their management skills, is about to commence.

The most relevant results of this case are:

→ high level of **participation** - participative methodology is probably one of the most powerful instruments of social control

→ **ownership** - only the feeling of ownership of the document guarantees its' implementation

→ **simultaneous adoption of budget and program** – the practice of adopting budget and program at the same time rarely appears in Croatia even though the program is not actually feasible without detailed matching the two documents

→ **cyclical process of adoption of budget** – on a yearly basis taking into account the Strategic program and the Operation plan

→ **public hearing** – for the first time public hearing appeared as something more than a formal, post festum, discussion on a development document

Foreword

Participation originated in the field of community development (Warburton 1997). First approaches to participation were promoted in 1970s as a reaction to the failure of specialised scientific disciplines and economic growth itself, to solve social and environmental problems. The United Nations and the World Bank are leading proponents of participation. The first major international document to promote participation in sustainable development did not occur until after the Earth Summit in the early 1990s. It rejected traditional top-down perspectives in favor of bottom-up people-centered development and emphasized education of all levels of society (Younis 1997 p.300).

Even though participation is not a new concept it is still hardly known in Croatia. Through this paper phases of elaboration process of development document will be explained, the importance of the participation elaborated and new experiences put down.

Decades of non participation

An impact of the past (period of socialism) is felt nowadays in the frame of development planning. Specialists of last few decades (but also the present ones) have appeared not enough capable to elaborate appropriate long-term oriented strategies. On the other hand their implementation was questionable. Most of the strategies, development programs and plans have never been even presented, not to mention implementation. Those who should have realised this task (i.e. the municipalities, cities, counties, national government, various organisations, enterprises, etc.) have never been sanctioned for not executing it and the result were book-shelves occupied with useless documents.

Use of narrow specialised disciplines to analyse the situation and elaborate a development document appeared inadequate in order to solve lot of problems concerning potential beneficiaries. Therefore, social and political insights besides the time economic one, were noticed as unavoidable, and included in elaboration of development programs. Incorporating different disciplines, always having in mind the legal framework where the complexity of interdependencies between national, regional/county and municipality/city level often determine the flow of the whole

process, has stimulated the emergence of transdisciplinary approaches in the late 1980s and 1990s (Fisher and Hovermann 1988; Tighe and Taplin 1990). The emphasis has changed from single disciplines to multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary to now transdisciplinary approaches as the general scientific community has recognised the need for integrated, holistic and systemic methods (Kelly 2001).

Steps to development document at the local community level

Preparation of a document for adoption, takes several phases, starting with the estimation of readiness of potential beneficiary and ending with adoption of the document. Each phase is characterised by some key recognisable elements and presents (with specific ponderosity) relevant part of the development planning chain.

The estimation of readiness of potential beneficiaries

Crucial moment is, certainly, initiation of elaboration itself. The initiation should come from future beneficiaries in order to facilitate further co-operation and especially implementation. Taking this step could be interpreted, speaking in terms of Croatian development planning, that one local community is strongly interested in adopting new methodologies, especially those stipulated by the EU and is willing to create the document according to these rules, a participative methodology in particular.

Exact example of doing so, happened in the City of Samobor, one of the most, economically and administratively developed Croatian cities (in the range of cities of 35 000 inhabitants). Few ambitious people, obviously pretty familiar with the conditions that have to be fulfilled to enter EU, referred to the Institute of Economics asking for professional help in delivering such a document. It turned out, during elaboration period, that this was the crucial moment. Lessons learned from past showed that documents that have not been asked for, but produced “outsourcingly”, had never been implemented. To avoid mistakes from the past, present should be changed, according to the well-articulated needs and expectations.

If readiness has been assessed positively by side of external experts/facilitators, first prerequisite for entering the elaboration procedure is fulfilled.

The establishment of the “development board”

The next step to be taken in the process is establishment of a development board, the body responsible for the preparation of the program. The development board is represented by the competent and highly motivated individuals, whose expertise covers variety of professional fields, important for further analysis. The board is an elected body which task covers preparing and supervising necessary steps, ensuring technical and administrative back-up to higher levels, proposing decisions and reporting on ongoing processes. Independence in deciding depends on the actual regulations of the board and of the resolutions of the assembly (council) (Dräger 2003).

The project of elaboration of the Strategic Development Program of the City of Samobor started in the end of 2001. After initial discussions about the elaboration, the development board was established and took above mentioned responsibilities. The board also founded teams needed to undertake the SWOT analysis. Involving of local experts from the very beginning and meeting the external experts through kick-off meeting should be the path of obtaining consensus, as a requirement of future co-operation. The result of kick-off meeting are tasks of each teams and the board in general, overtaken responsibilities and timeframe of the complete project and its' components.

Situation analysis – SWOT

SWOT (an acronym from Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats) has been rarely used analytical tool in the past Croatian development practice due to predominance of various more sophisticated methods. These methods resulted, most of the time, with hardly understandable results for those to whom they were intended to. First SWOT analyses were developed for the application in big companies to allow the planning of the future strategy of the enterprise. As the time passed, SWOT analysis has penetrated more and more into other fields. High utility of such type of scrutiny and readability of the outcome, seems appropriate to apply to projects where wide public is included. Different educational background of the readers, various fields of interests, working experience, number of end users etc. are pushing factors of choice between other possible methods and SWOT analysis. Therefore in elaboration of different

development documents, which implementation somehow directly or indirectly include public, the simplicity of reading the statements given in SWOT table is the best way to approach the most distant user. First of all the difference between strengths and opportunities and weaknesses and threats should be clearly distinguished because of frequent misunderstandings of each category. While strengths and weaknesses indicate internal, more or less stable/static structures/facts, on which condition and intensity the actors of the analyzed unit/sector/region have a direct influence (by taking adequate action-project, measures, etc.) the opportunities and threats indicate external, more or less dynamic structures/facts, on which condition and intensity the actors of analyzed unit/sector/region have no direct influence (by taking adequate action projects, measures etc.) (Dräger 2003). The result of the SWOT analysis is a clear picture of existing situation, internally and externally, what is a starting point for determination of positive or negative impacts (that could be found in each category) on further development. Analyzed units/sectors/regions in the SWOT can not be observed individually but in correlation with other factors outside monitored one. Only deep and careful insight into existing situation ensures recognizing the problems (deriving mostly from weaknesses) that could be somehow transformed into achievable goals. Lack of practice in SWOT analyzing and confusing the meaning of terms „threat“ and „weakness“ show that in the beginning, the threat category is one of the biggest in number of statements; after repeated discussions this category is shrunk and the number of weaknesses is increased considerably (Dräger 2003.). The individual statements have to be formulated in a way that the meaning of the statement is understandable to the interested and involved persons other than the authors.

The development board of the City of Samobor expressed positive attitude towards SWOT analysis whereas five of them have been undertaken. Expert teams analyzed five different sectors and intensively discussed the results, trying to fill the boxes of the table as punctual as possible, avoiding contradictions and conflicts between categories and re-assessing it as long as mutual understanding of the meaning of the statements has not been reached. Besides economy sector, social sector, environment and spatial planning (that are usually observed together but because of its' complexity were analyzed separately), for the first time in Croatian practice the institutional sector has been „examined“. Namely, institutions of the socialist era have never been analyzed because theirs' functioning was strictly proposed from the state which performance was unquestionable by default. Nevertheless, the administration of the City of Samobor,

realizing their own disadvantages, was brave enough to cope with new way of thinking and observing. Giving an introspective view of own „health condition“, and many times confessing own dirty laundry, was pretty tough and unpleasant task for those who are current employees of the analyzed sector.

The analysis of existing budget, programs, plans

In the course of development document elaboration, the existing policies of elaboration and adopting the budget, other programs and plans, should be taken in consideration in time. New strategic program comprises a long-term table of measures and projects and an operational plan in which resources for implementation are foreseen in the coming period. Of high importance is to notice the link between the budget and operational plan in time, and to leave enough time for both to be discussed, separately and parallelly. The resources needed for implementation of operational plan have to be underpinned with the budget plan or they will never be realized to the highest possible extent. To avoid overlapping of programs, projects and measures in the Strategic program, other existing programs and plans should be considered. If not, very soon will be realized that unnecessary time and resources consuming sometimes run to conflict situations and mixed responsibility order.

Even though, the Strategic program was synchronized and harmonized with the budget of coming fiscal year, experience of Samobor has shown that the budget, programs and plans should have been taken into consideration earlier, and studied more thoroughly than they were. Obviously the methodology of elaboration of strategic development programs has not been fully adjusted to the Croatian situation and each methodological step has yet to be appropriately defined.

From SWOT analysis to the proposal of the draft of program

The results of final tables of SWOT analysis are to be discussed on a workshop. Workshop is an active approach towards solving the problems and the purpose of the workshop is giving an equal possibility to various interest groups and individuals, who directly/indirectly belong to some of the analyzed sectors, to be involved in the elaboration process and give their inputs through constructive critics, comments and

proposals. Referring to statements of the column Weaknesses, the group, led by the team leader (often the one who made the analysis), should identify the key problems, although most often there are more problems that can be effectively discussed. Specific voting system, in which the number of votes given to the problem/s is always one less than the number of problems, impedes the chance that one or few persons dominate the identification of the key problems and to push their own views. After voting has been finished, and the problems are shrunk to optimal number to be discussed, they should be transformed from passive statements to the objectives. Contrary to the problem stands the solution itself, and this is articulated through objective, where objective stands as a condition in which problem does not exist any more. Two types of objectives could be defined: dynamic and static ones. While dynamic ones by their “continuous” nature, appear as processes, results of which last after the measure has been completely implemented, static ones have a “finite” nature meaning that once the static objective has been achieved, there is no need to keep on with the measure any more. The other characteristic of the objective is that it should be expressed in the present, although it is meant to be achieved in the future. This way of expressing better describes feasibility of something. Expressing in the future, could assume some imaginary actions to be taken and kind of delusion in the very beginning. Objectives also have their level of importance and level of interdependence with other objectives. Therefore, level of importance and level of interdependence should be precisely assessed, while achieving one objective presumes activating some resources-financial, personal, time. Number of selected objectives that should be achieved then assumes multiplied consuming sources (that are often not only less than is necessary, but even scarce). Relations between them should be carefully estimated in a way of maximum utility of positive impacts of one objective on the maximum possible number, in whatever extent, of other objectives. “Cross-examination” will naturally deliver the objectives with the highest level of importance and those with the highest level of impacts on others. After establishment of objectives, measures and projects that should be undertaken to achieve these objectives should be determined. The determination of measures and projects for each objective is then followed by their harmonization and agreement. Each measure or project should contain following information: responsible institution, degree of priority, implementation period, expected expenditures during the implementation period (disaggregated financial sources if possible) and remarks. The excerpt that derives from the long-term strategic program is an operational plan. Plan of

operation, called also “action-plan”, has to be designed in a detailed way to allow the identification of necessary and feasible steps (Dräger 2003). The plan of operation provides a list of necessary and adequate measures for an overseeable period of four to five years. Thus, it serves as a guide for public expenditures, for searching co-finances for investment projects, and – not least – as a possibility for the public to challenge the political and administrative competence, capability and commitment (Dräger 2003). Indicating feasible and realistic measures and projects contrary to the list of wishes, could guarantee its’ implementation sooner or later.

City of Samobor has shown high capability and motivation firstly to recognize all possible measures and then to sort out the feasible ones and harmonize them so that they were “implementable” right after adoption of the document.

Politicians’ “assessment” of proposal of draft of document

The document consisting of summary of the analysis, explanation of transformation of weaknesses/threats into problems and later objectives, followed by the two tables is the draft of the document. The form of the paper is such that it can serve as an issue for the discussions in front of the politicians. As in lot of transitional countries, political aspect of development planning can not be avoided even though the document is the result of internal and external experts, and expresses, to a certain extent, the will of wider public. The (local) government has to approve the measures in each phase (political representatives are constantly being informed about taken actions in order to elaborate proposal of draft) and finally, version of a proposal of draft has to be approved before public hearing has commenced.

From the very beginning, i.e. formal resolution of development board, the mayor of the City of Samobor and executive government i.e. City Board of City of Samobor were not only familiar with but also supportive to the idea of elaboration a strategic document of the kind that has never been done before. The most important reason, in the mind of many politicians, for supporting the idea of the elaboration of a development program is conservative attitude that the delivered program presumes development by itself. This is far away from the truth. It is perhaps the first brick, the base, but its’ implementation needs much more engagement than printing 70, 80 or more pages of well-decorated text.

Public hearing and promotion of development document

The draft is adopted. What is the next step? Through the process of elaboration, more and more individuals and interest groups are getting involved. The culmination of involvement of wide public, i.e. the highest degree of participation is expected through the public hearing. If the participative methodology has been accepted as the basic idea in the elaboration process, then involvement of the public is probably one of the crucial steps in the process. Therefore, public hearing campaign has to be carefully prepared, conducted and evaluated and acceptable results should be put in the program. The volume of campaign has to be well balanced. Balance presumes good estimation of financial, personal and time resources, determination of participation methods that will be the most effective in approaching the wider public, the most adequate locations and terms to attract the public, respecting their daily, weekly and monthly obligations. Due to unusual “target market”, obtaining the goal of the campaign, that is involvement of the largest possible number of participants, was a pretty demanding task for the campaign designers. Special concern has to be dedicated to this part of the process.

Extremely interested and motivated from the very beginning, Samoborians wanted to enter the final round as proposed by the methodology. The final version of proposal of draft of program was adopted in summer, which they estimated as inadequate, for practical reasons (vacations), time for the campaign. Longer postponing of commencing the campaign would diminish “temperature” that has been raised during months of elaboration, so the end of summer and beginning of autumn, were considered as being acceptable period for public hearing/discussions. The second reason for such action, was the fact that annual budget had to be adopted in December of the same year. Willingness to achieve simultaneous adoption of the program and the budget, presumed that the final version of the program, with incorporated results of public hearing, should be finished till the end of November. The campaign was imagined to start with informing public on the local radio. The day after, the local newspapers announced the program as their annex, leaflets with recognizable logo were dispatched wherever public had a chance to pick them up, the brochures with summarized draft of program were distributed to the public locations (local committees, schools, libraries, bookstores, hospital, market), NGO’s, sport clubs, etc. Draft of the program was also accessible via Internet site of the City of Samobor and all the materials used in elaboration were in the City Hall at disposal. To enable the citizens to react on the program faster, last page of

the brochure was designed in the form of two postcards with empty tables to be filled with critical remarks, comments and suggestions. An empty table for measures, resembling the one from the draft program was also attached ready to be filled in with measure proposals. Public discussions were held 15 times (five times supported by the external experts), trying to cover all distant places and villages, whose inhabitants (often neglected) also had a right to give their own vote. The Development Board, expressed lot of positive emotions and commitment to the work they were doing, particularly in this phase. The results of public hearing were evaluated. Comments, suggestions amendments and critics were discussed and those well-argued were included in the final version of the program.

Adoption of the program

After the public hearing ended, and final draft version of the program created, the program was presented to the City Board and shortly afterwards to the City Council. The program was adopted, with few changes and amendments. Adoption went smoothly, partially due to good presentation of the document, done by the external experts from the Institute of Economics and due to high level of awareness of on-going process of elaboration. Extremely important thing that took place at the same session of the Council was the adoption of the budget for the up-coming fiscal year. Even though these two items should be commonly discussed together, it is not the Croatian practice. Taking into consideration, that resources needed for the implementation of the program (great majority of them) are linked with their sources in the budget, demonstrates new way of modeling the future engagements of financial means. Only advanced city administration is capable to conduct the policy of formulating the development program and the budget together, and support coherency between them.

Monitoring and evaluation

Elaboration of the program ends with the adoption of the document but this should not be the last step in complete process of development planning. It would not be too exaggerating to state that even more important step is implementation of the program. Further external consulting should be continued, but this practice should be abandoned as the times go by. The mission of the development planning is to build capacity of the

local administration/community whereas local administration is initiator and promoter of future development. The system of punishments and awards should be established so that those who take responsibility for achieving the objectives are really responsible for their acts.

One of the lessons learned is that time and resources (especially financial ones) are not obstacles to elaboration of one strategic document (columns time scale and financial resources). Real obstacles could be not enough educated personnel, insufficient number of them and rejection of idea (unwillingness) of elaboration the development document.

Summarized data about the development planning process are given in the Table 1.

No.	Phase	Activities	Degree of participation			Time scale			Financial resources		
			Low	mid	high	Up to 1 month	1-2 months	More than 2 months	low	middle	high
1.	The estimation of readiness of potential beneficiary	preliminary discussions	+			+			+		
2.	The establishment of the “development board”	kick-off meeting	→			+			+		
3.	Situation analysis – SWOT	data collecting and analysis	+				+			+	
4.	The analysis of existing budget, programs, plans	analysing and comparing, desktop research	+				+		+		
5.	From SWOT analysis to proposal of draft of program	preparing the draft proposals		→				+		+	
6.	Politicians’ “assessment” of draft of the document	commenting the draft		+		+			+		
7.	Public hearing, amending and promotion of development document	preparing and conducting campaign			+			+			+
8.	Adoption of program	preparing the draft for the assembly of City council		+		+			+		
9.	Monitoring and evaluation	monitoring	+					+	+		

Aspect of participation in development planning process – the key to success

Framework of participation

The context of participation is determined by the social, cultural, economic and environmental factors which differ in each situation, as well as being dynamic over space and time. Participation has various purposes including improving government decision making, increasing awareness of problematic local issues, encouraging community ownership and commitment to changes in traditional way of thinking. Participation is also determined by the scales, regional and local, which for pragmatic reasons need different approaches, result of which is less involvement at the regional scale than at the local scale. The participatory processes used in the various programs and projects are described in terms of (a) the function or goal of participation, (b) the structure of participation or processes and/or methods used, and (c) the scale (whether it is national, State, regional or local).

Two types of democracy, participative and representative one, offer the public two different types of participation. While collective decision-making offers participation, representative democracy appears as a representative system of government, which is not easily compatible with the participation promoted in government documentation. Power, or varying levels of control between researchers or institutions and local people, is the most common criterion used to identify different types of participation. In simple typologies, levels of power sharing are expressed merely as a dichotomy; in complex typologies, however, many levels of power sharing are described. All levels could be called participation but with varying degrees of power sharing between the supposed beneficiaries (often referred to as local people) and the initiators (such as researchers, planners and government or agency staff) (Kelly, 2001). Power sharing is a politically sensitive feature of participatory activities, and organizers have a complex task in working out the degree to which decision-making power should be shared. The level of power sharing tends to fluctuate during the life of the project.

Other criteria mentioned in the literature include:

- number of people involved-wide versus narrow (Farrington and Bebbington 1993)
- role of the people involved (Jiggins 1993; Cornwall 1995)
- goal of participation-behaviour change, transfer of information, advice about needs, facilitation of learning, organizational development (Landre and Knuth 1993).

These typologies imply that there is an ideal level of power sharing. Power relationships are inherent in the social context within which participation occurs. However, as Warburton (1997) has pointed out, the suggestion from the literature that more is better is questionable. Devolving power to local people may not be feasible or desirable (Murthy 1998) and the statement that more is better may not be always true. Murthy (1998) has stated that it is only assumed that a greater level of participation leads to greater empowerment and more effective projects but feasibility of 100% participation is a myth because local people do not always wish to be involved (Guijt and Shah 1998).

Participation is often described in terms of dichotomies such as *shallow versus deep* or *weak versus strong*. These terms are value-laden and imply that participation that does not share power in decision-making is “wrong” and the only “true” participation occurs where local people have a say.

The context of participation is critically important and suggests that (a) context will influence the type of participation that is appropriate or possible and (b) different participatory approaches may be appropriate in different stages of the same project. Participation needs to be flexible, sensitive to the complexity of community relationships and designed for the specific context.

Two concepts related to participation are power and learning—the degree to which power is shared between actors is commonly used to differentiate between types of participation. Participatory approach needs to be designed to manage both, the power relationships and the learning outcomes so that local communities can contribute positively to solution of problems of the community.

There are more elusive aspects, such as ownership and sustainability whereas ownership and commitment are more likely to occur if people have the option to be involved in decision-making during the project. Local community participation may occur in various stages of any project whereas the number and type of stages within a project vary according to the type of project. Communities become involved mainly in the needs-assessment stage and during the evaluation stage of the projects examined. A high level of decision-making power should be shared with the community from the earliest stage to the evaluation stage. Ownership and commitment are more likely to occur if people are involved in defining the problem, then planning and developing the project.

High levels of involvement could occur in the early stages of some programs but drop off as time passed. Reduction in involvement over time was highlighted by Guijt and Shah (1998) who noted that a high level of participation by local people often occurs in early stages of projects. Participation has several dimensions which interact, and all these dimensions need to be examined before the design is chosen.

Importance of institutional back up for reaching positive results

On the path of reaching acceptable results much constraints such as the capacity of institutions to support participatory approaches, the capacity of the staff to facilitate participation (with its inherent conflicts) and the capacity of the local community members need to be considered. Participation requires flexible government arrangements and responses, and often takes longer and is more expensive than initially thought. Poorly designed and implemented participation can be worse than no community participation at all, therefore the constraints need to be recognized before government agencies embark on any participatory activities (Kelly 2001).

Many institutional arrangements actually hinder effective participation. It has to be clarified why participation has been undertaken, who is going to participate, regulations and political impacts on approaches to community involvement that could assist or impede building trust between government and local community members whereas participation should be improved by the grater coordination between government and public. The capacity of the institutions to support participatory approaches is sometimes underestimated: participation takes time and costs money, usually more than is expected. The process of social change is slow, particularly when barriers of mistrust need to be broken down and organizational commitment needs to be long-term. Participatory approaches are more time-consuming than traditional approaches, which focus on content rather than process. Bureaucratic arrangements need to be more flexible and adaptable to respond to the needs of participatory approaches and the requests of local participants. Staff needs skills in planning and implementing participatory approaches. Communication skills of facilitators need to be seen as essential rather than optional. Communications skills, personality and attitudes of facilitators are often more important than the choice of method. Before initiating participatory activities, facilitators need to consider their own skills and the institutional constraints within which they

are operating. Pragmatic realism may dictate that the ideal design, methods and techniques need to be adapted. Also, the complex dimensions of participation and the implications of these dimensions when participatory activities are being designed and implemented need to be considered. However, even with careful planning and the best of intentions, individual staff cannot implement participatory activities effectively without institutional support. Change is needed within government, where institutional systems need to be adjusted to remove impediments to participation.

Facilitators in the participatory approach should be professionally trained. The desirable characteristics include someone enthusiastic, someone who is a good listener, can communicate well, is energetic, and not “an overbearing personality”, has a practical knowledge and has rapport with local community members (Kelly 2001). Facilitators have the role of “experts” in local communities, yet they frequently fail to recognize the power they hold in relationships.

Some of the factors that enhance participation are:

- honesty, good communication skills and understanding of local people,
- sufficient time to establish relationships and undertake participatory activities,
- general public willingness to participate in government programs,
- transparency of the process, so that people understand what to expect.

Facilitators initiating participation need to recognize whether participation is appropriate or not and to take all the possible factors into consideration to achieve the best possible results.

Building of social capital

The prerequisite for successful programs are people-centered approaches that are context-specific. The understanding that the perspectives and knowledge of local people has a great value means that institutions could learn from the community and new approaches could be used in the search for a sustainable future. There have been significant changes in attitudes to participation and a trend to support the increasing use of participatory approaches continues. It should be highlighted that learning has become an integral component of participation (sometimes one of the goals of participation), whether institutions learn from local people, or local people learn from each other.

Although the adage “knowledge is power” contains much truth, local knowledge is often under-utilized.

Building social capital also means building local capacity, whereas trust, networks and social links are basic ingredients of social capital (Cavaye 2000).

A mechanism for building social capital is participatory learning where different stakeholder groups interact constructively, they listen to each other and learn from each other and build trust. High social capital in communities is linked with strong cohesion, constructive communication, empowerment and less dependence on the government hierarchy (Cavaye 2000; Putman 1993). One of the chief prerequisites for building social capital is learning. The norm in institutions still tends to be teaching and technology transfer, rather than learning. Participatory learning actively seeks diversity and multiple perspectives by increasing the participation of stakeholders.

The context in which the participatory activities occur is critical to their success and must be considered when designing them. Key pylons on which is participation approach based, are:

→ Participation is a process, which involves stakeholders in issues which affect them.

→ Power refers to the degree to which power is shared decision-making.

→ Learning is the transformation of knowledge, which assists decision-making. It incorporates the acquisition of knowledge, but can also incorporate enhancing skills, developing new attitudes, raising aspirations and developing empowerment.

Partnerships take a long time to form. Sometimes the trust to individual government staff is possible to build, but it doesn't assume the trust to an agency.

For participants is very important to be able to “have a say”. If the participatory process provides the opportunity for participants to influence decisions, they are positive; but if they feel they are wasting their time and are critical and if they believe they are not listened to and cannot influence government decisions, the result will be negative (Kelly 2001).

For practical reasons, it is difficult and expensive to involve everyone at the regional scale, and more feasible to involve everyone in a local area. This dimension has two aspects: (a) the specific groups and individuals from those groups who should be involved and (b) the number of people who need to be involved. Whom to involve depends on the function of the group and the function of participation. Local people are often chosen to be part of representative groups because of their specific skills and knowledge. Despite efforts of community and government members to encourage participation, there is always a number of stakeholder

groups that remains poorly represented. Through designing specific participatory approaches for particular groups, interest groups become more representative, which contributes to the positive results of building social capital.

Conclusion

In the 1990s, the design of participatory approaches changed as the traditional extension approaches were seen as not achieving the desired purposes or goals. The need to integrate multiple perspectives and knowledge from various sources to find solutions marked the beginning of new processes in the field of participation (Kelly 2001).

Although the use of participative approaches has risen, one must not assume that traditional approaches have been rejected. Different approaches are complementary. Traditional and participation approaches are appropriate in different contexts. To be truly participatory, the purpose for which local people are involved needs to be clearly explained to the supposed beneficiaries. The World Bank (1996 p.3) has named the more traditional approach the “external expert stance” as opposed to a “participatory stance” where decision-making power is shared with local people (World Bank 1996 p.3). These polarized positions of power sharing are also referred to as “top-down” and “bottom-up”.

No matter how successful participatory processes have been in similar contexts, or even in the same context at a different time, every context has unique features. Participatory approaches need to be adapted to fit, or be designed especially for, the given situation. Participation is complex, with lot of dimensions. Consequently, designers of activities need to be cognizant of the appropriate scale, degree of power sharing, relevant stakeholders, skills of the individual facilitators, resources available, regional constraints and so on.

Participation needs to be contextual, not only for different situations or projects, but also within projects. Planning participatory activities requires an iterative process because the answers to questions in one dimension may alter after other dimensions have been investigated. Processes should be flexible and responsive while remaining consistent with the overall principles that influenced the design. Flexibility in the processes during the life of the project and a readiness to adapt to unforeseen circumstances (as new information emerges, or some of the dimensions change over time) are essential principles in designing and implementing participatory approaches.

In the process of accession to the European Union (Agreement on Stabilization and Accessing), Croatia expressed willingness to fulfil all the conditions from the Agreement to meet another round of adjoining. On this path is also implementation of participative methodology where Croatia shows successful cases of doing so. This paper could be input for the future successful stories.

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