

Đokiæ, Irena; Šišinaèki, Jelena

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**PREPARATION OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES:
IS PARTICIPATION THE RIGHT WAY?**

Paper prepared for the
44th Congress of the European Regional Science Association, Porto, Portugal
25 – 29th August, 2004

Irena Đokić
Jelena Šišinački

Institute of Economics, Zagreb
Kennedy Sq. 7, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia
E-mail addresses: idokic@eizg.hr jsisinacki@eizg.hr

Abstract

If you want to run a successful regional policy you need to behave similar to the company manager: you need to have vision, mission, strategy and action plans. In Croatia, during the past 13 years, more than 100 official national and regional documents called "strategies", "programmes" or "plans" have been produced. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that Croatia has an extensive experience in the production of such documents. Nevertheless, in the last couple of years Croatia has and is still receiving international and financial assistance for the production of development projects. Why? Although many, too many strategic documents were produced, once when the supervisory body adopts such documents, they usually end up in somebody's draw and without any repercussion stay there. Through the international assistance a new, participative methodology in regional development planning was applied with three regional programmes as results. The first

section of this paper briefly explains the old practice and distinctive features of the participative methodology. The major part of the paper is focusing on the analysis of the three pilot programmes: Island of Šolta, Town of Virovitica and Town of Samobor. The idea behind these analyses is the critical overview and evaluation of the participative methodology implementation successfulness regional development planning. Although the analysis indicate that there are certain objective as well as subjective obstacles for sound implementation of participative methodology, the three pilot programmes clearly mark the new approach to regional development planning in Croatia. The last section of the paper is providing recommendations for the participation methodology future improvement in regional planning.

Key words: regional development, strategic planning, participative methodology

1. Introduction

Croatia has quite an experience in the planning procedures from the socialist era. With a form of the new state, planning process was considered as unimportant, bearing in mind that market will fulfil this task. After a couple of years it had become evident that planing in a market economy is also necessary, so mass production of various development and operational plans, strategies and similar documents on all levels of government (national, regional and local) was initiated. The great majority of produced documents had one common characteristic: once they were completed and adopted by the respective authority they were never used in practice! Lack of participation of the stakeholders while developing such documents and no legal sanctions for the omission of the implementation of the adopted documents were the main obstacles for the successful implementation of those documents.

In the frame of the overall project “Croatia Regional Development Planning Support Project”, through an international technical assistance, a uniform methodology has been applied in order to prepare strategic development documents for local government units. Three different local government units have been selected as the pilot sites where participative methodology for development planning was implemented: cities of Virovitica and Samobor and municipality (island) of Šolta.

The following sections describe how the principles of methodology have been applied in particular pilot sites. In the first section we present the overview of the participative methodology and continue with the methodology used while working on the three pilot cases in the second section. Third section is devoted to the particularities of each of the three pilot cases while the last section present lessons learned and potentials for the improvement of the methodology.

Any conclusion or comments are not the official standpoint of the project or implementing institutions but personal opinions of the authors, gathered from their experience while working on the project.

2. Participative methodology

Participation originated in the field of community development (Warburton, 1998). First approaches to participation were promoted in 1970s as a reaction to the failure of specialised scientific disciplines and economic growth itself, to resolve social and environmental problems. 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 favour of bottom-up people-centred development and emphasised education of all levels of society (Younis, 1997).

Incorporating different disciplines, always having in mind the legal framework where the complexity of interdependencies between national, regional and local 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).

In the 1990s, the designs 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) 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). These polarised positions of power sharing are also referred to as “top-down” and “bottom-up”.

Context of participation

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.

Participation needs to be contextual, not only for different situations or projects, but also within projects. 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 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. Designers of activities need to be cognisant of the appropriate scale, degree of power sharing, relevant stakeholders, skills of the individual facilitators, resources available, regional constraints and so on. 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 are essential principles in designing and implementing participatory approaches.

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.

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.

The prerequisite for successful programs are people-oriented 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.

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

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.

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 recognised 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 greater co-ordination 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 organisational 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. 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 recognise 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 recognise whether participation is appropriate or not and to take all the possible factors into consideration to achieve the best possible results.

3. Putting methodology into practice

Preparation for the launching of pilot projects in Croatia, for which development strategies based on the participative methodology were produced, started in 2000. Selection of the local government units was based on several criteria, including the size of local government units, geographical position, accomplished economic level etc. while the final decision was based on the initiative and willingness to co-operate expressed by the local government units. In January 2001 the City of Virovitica and Island of Šolta were selected, followed by the City of Samobor in December 2001.

Preparation of a document for adoption took several phases, starting with the estimation of readiness of potential beneficiary and ending with adoption of the document. Each phase has been characterised by some key recognisable elements and presents relevant part of the development planning chain.

Sequence of necessary steps that needed to be taken was following:

1. Performance of structural analysis;
2. Identification of key problems;
3. Formulation of development vision and objectives; and
4. Project documentation.

Structural analysis refers to the detailed analysis of the existing structures. SWOT analyses of social and economic sector were produced as well as the SWOT analysis of the institutional framework and spatial and environmental conditions.

Based on the findings from the structural analysis and comments using the SWOT table, it was necessary to identify and rank key problems across different sectors and sub sectors. This step had a particular importance since it was a basis for the strategic orientation in the future. In this phase it was crucial that all interested parties actively participated in order to successfully define integrated development strategies.

When formulating a development vision and objectives a strategic element of development strategy was considered. Similar to the previous phase, in this phase participation of interest groups was needed for successful definition of future strategies. Formulation of development vision of objectives was designed through a workshop, and formulated objectives had to be feasible and realistic but limited per sector in order to focus on the most critical one.

Project documentation refers to the design of the plan of operation and implementation mechanisms. Plan of operation, as usually, consisted from measures, responsible institutions, priority rank, implementation period and cost estimation.

Preparation of the development documents in all three pilot cases, besides general principles of sequence of necessary steps, was executed in the following phases: 1. Estimation of readiness of potential beneficiaries; 2. Kick-off seminar; 3. Establishment of development councils and development teams; 4. SWOT analysis; 5. Workshop; 6. Team work; 7. Harmonisation of measures; 8. Harmonisation with political programmes, current programs and plans and the budget; 9. Draft and public hearing; 10. Action plan; 11. Adoption (by Development council, City Board, City Council); 12. Monitor and evaluation (by local self-government) and 13. Further consulting (by experts).

Although the same methodology with its' principles has been applied in each case, there are some differences from one to another. Following sections contain particularities by each case, in order to demonstrate lessons learned form the practical use of participative methodology. For the detailed information on the implemented participative methodology see Dräger et al (2004).

4. Particularities of the pilot projects

The City of Virovitica

The City of Virovitica is the first chosen pilot site where participative methodology was intended to be applied. To better understand general conditions under which this pilot program was performed it is necessary to mention that the City of Virovitica is situated in the area that was severely affected by the war, and consequently records high unemployment rates, unfavourable business environment etc.

The first particularity in the case of Virovitica was that experts selected this pilot site, i.e. preliminary discussions were initiated upon the interest of consultants, the result of which was beginning of co-operation between these two parts. During the execution of the project, such external choice reflected to the decrease in motivation during the preparation process (even though some individuals were highly motivated) and perception of the development program as something that was not their own property.

As it was the first pilot site, the experts did most of the SWOT analyses. The information and the database available had serious limitations (data were often out-dated, available information were hard to find and if found they were not structured). Due to that fact, experts exchanged their views so objectivity was to a certain extent lost (Dräger, 2002). Local government unit has been only partially engaged in the elaboration of the sector-specific plans of operation. They were consulted and their comments were included into the SWOT analysis, but most of those comments were not analytically supported.

This especially refers to the statement done by many local people that political situation is a huge obstacle for the successful development of the City of Virovitica. From the today's perspective, it was a risk that experts have taken into account and stress and the main threat in the SWOT analysis but it turned out that this problem was a precondition for successful implementation of the development strategies that, unfortunately, was not accomplished. Consequently, attention of involved people in the project could not be focused on the development program.

The existence of a program was widely accepted as far as the program was settled at the same level as many, many programs and strategies before: as a document with little or even no consequences on local community. In a moment when it became obvious that a different approach foster transparency, direct involvement of all stakeholders and reveals internal procedures and weaknesses, the program created resistance. Also, with the development of the program it became obvious that expressed need for the development programme was more of declarative nature and below the surface there was a huge resistance (Dräger, 2002).

Another trend that was noticed in the habit of local government and administration is to shift the responsibility of any decision to external experts or the upper administrative level, even if the decision was made at the local level. For decades, the local and regional governments and administration were not in the position to take over responsibilities for any initiative at the respective level. Nowadays, the decentralisation process shifted the responsibilities to the subnational levels and suddenly the decision-makers realise that it is easy to cut decisions but much more difficult to explain and to justify those decisions.

The City of Samobor

Crucial moment is, certainly, initiation of elaboration itself. The initiation should come from the future beneficiaries in order to facilitate further co-operation and especially implementation. The feeling of ownership (mentioned in the previous parts) raises from the fact that future beneficiary are willing to prepare the document and to implement it later. Lessons that citizens of the small-developed town of Samobor learned from the past showed that documents that have not been asked for, but produced “externally”, had never been implemented. It turned out, during the preparation that the bottom-up initiative was one of the most relevant moments in the whole process.

Establishment of a Development Council, as the body responsible for the preparation of the program, differs the case of the City of Samobor from other pilots. The Development Council assembles the competent and highly motivated individuals, whose expertise covers variety of professional fields, important for further analysis.

Joint involvement of local experts from the very beginning and meeting the external experts as methodological guidance secured the path for further participation and obtaining the consensus on main development issues, as a requirement of future co-operation. The Development Council selected capable individuals from their local community to undertake the necessary analysis whose work ended up with thoroughly analysed sectors.

Development 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. Even though the program for Samobor was synchronised and harmonised with the budget of coming fiscal year, experience has shown that the budget, programs and plans should have been taken into consideration earlier, and studied more thoroughly than they were.

From the very beginning, i.e. formal resolution of Development Council, the mayor and the City Board 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.

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 2002, which they estimated as inadequate, for practical reasons (vacations), time for commencing the campaign. Longer postponing of the campaign 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 with attached program were available, leaflets with recognisable logo were dispatched wherever public had a chance to pick them up, the brochures with summarised draft of program were distributed to the public locations (local committees, schools, libraries, bookstores, hospital, market), NGOs, 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 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, trying to cover all distant places and villages, whose inhabitants also had a right to give their own vote. The Development Council, expressed lot of positive emotions and commitment to the work they were doing, particularly in this phase.

The citizens of Samobor have shown high capability and motivation, firstly to recognise all possible measures with projections of needed financial sources and then to sort out the feasible ones and harmonise them, so that they were “implementable” right after adoption of the document.

Adoption, with few changes and amendments, went smoothly. Extremely important thing that took place at the same session of the Council was the adoption of the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Even though these two items should be commonly discussed together, it is not the Croatian practice. Taking into consideration, that sources needed for the implementation of the program (great majority of them) are linked with their sources in the budget, demonstrates new way of modelling 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.

After the document has been adopted, implementation of the measures from the action plan could commence. The practice of frequent consulting services, by side of external experts, was slowly abandoned and the role of experts was more concentrated on specific measures, agreed in the agreement. First of all constancy relates to capacity building of administration so that they could operate in the future without external assistance. As a rare example, politics officially based its' program on Strategic development program trying to harmonise objectives from both.

The Island of Šolta

A pilot site, the Island of Šolta, in the County of Split-Dalmatia was chosen among 26 islands and island groups, for which Sustainable Island Development Programmes had to be prepared based on the Island Act and the corresponding Decree on the methodology. Šolta was chosen as a good pilot location, primarily due to its accessibility and the fact that there is only one municipality on the island. After several meetings and frequent communication, “pushed by” institutional obligation, the Municipality of Šolta was positively assessed to prepare Strategic development Island Programme.

The methodology applied during the preparation of the Pilot Programme for Šolta was later adopted by the former Ministry of public work, reconstruction and construction (MPWRC). In August 2001 the Croatian government adopted “Decree on mandatory content and methodology for preparation of sustainable island development programmes” (Official Gazette 94/02). Putting the bottom up - top down approach into practice presumes co-operation in preparation of the Development Strategy for the Island of Šolta with the Department for Island and Regional Development of the MPWRC.

Development council was never established on Šolta. Municipal council had overtaken the role of development council due to lack of enough competent individuals who could normally execute this function. Pretty clear role of development council did not resulted with expected results. The supervising body with previously mentioned functions was needed to secure the process of preparation that was left on Šolta to the Municipality of Šolta and external experts.

Although the SWOT analysis should be undertaken by teams, individual experts did it on Šolta. The insufficiency of experts in such a small local community could impede the course of the project, but with assistance of external experts a thorough analysis of the institutional framework, economic sector, social sector, spatial planning and environment of Šolta had been undertaken. The SWOT analysis provided almost complete insight into the situation and possibilities of the island, while the outline of institutional framework has proven beneficial. During the preparation of the development strategy, new municipal instruments and measures of development policy had been noticed, which were not elaborated so far.

Engagement of local experts had a double effect. Even though the level of understanding the SWOT analysis was initially low, it was important to realise that the capacity to learn exists. Presentation of the project and SWOT analysis initiated strategic way of thinking. Observing well-known situations, from the point of strengths and weaknesses, led to very useful and educational discussions. Such collected data and assessments have formed a good base for preparation of workshops that followed right after the analysis was undertaken. The same workshop procedure is followed in each case.

Identified development objectives needed to be obtained through projects and measures. Proposals of projects and measures were examined and the final list of projects and measures was prepared. One of the very useful experiences on Šolta, during the preparation of the Programme, refers to close and continuous co-operation with the mayor. All the results were inputs for the draft programme. Draft projects and measures were presented on a public gathering. The form of the document was fully adjusted to the Island Act as the Sustainable Island Development Programme of Šolta (SIDP) and submitted to the Municipality of Šolta for public hearing. At the same session, the Municipality Council adopted the Programme and decided to start the implementation of projects and measures. After adoption, the SIDP was officially sent to the MPWRC, which is in charge to send it for adoption to the Croatian government. While the Municipality of Šolta is obliged to send the programme to the responsible ministries on approval and in the procedure of adoption by the Croatian Government, “mainland” local self-government units are not.

The necessary step in the process is also the comparison of the programme with existing political programmes of parties that participate in the municipal government. Otherwise, the strategic programme could be considered as a parallel development programme, which, to a certain extent, opposes existing election programmes and promises. In the small island community lot of time politics is represented by the only one person-mayor itself who has decisive role. The impact of such decisions appears in the programme almost unavoidably.

At first, the implementation phase seemed to Šoltans an insurmountable task and a certain slowdown took place. This revealed the limited capability of local self-government for persistent implementation of adopted measures and an insufficient political will. Beside that, the local self-government was not willing to confess its own incompetence and neglected implementation of measures concerning institutional improvements.

Beside the financial help that is given to Šolta, consultants gave numerous practical advices, which should in the long term result in raising of the fiscal capacity of the municipal budget and rational spending, as the Šoltans have imagined in their programme.

Table 1 summarises the most significant particularities of each of the three pilot cases:

Table 1: Aspect of participation through development planning process

PARTICULARITIES		
Virovitica	Samobor	Šolta
External choice of pilot site	The estimation of readiness of potential beneficiary	Bottom up-top down approach
Political indolence towards development programme	Kick-off seminar	Institutional obligation (Island Act)
SWOT by external experts	Establishment of development council	Municipal council in the function of development council
Complete lack of feeling of ownership	Establishment of development teams	Individual experts for SWOT analysis
	Harmonisation with political programmes, current programmes and plans and the budget	Adoption of programme by Government
	Politicians' "assessment" of proposal of draft of document	Politics embodied in the person of mayor

	Preparation of draft and public hearing	Well balanced selection of feasible measures
	Action plan	Short term decisions that influence implementation of SIDP
	Adoption (by development council, city board, city council)	Lack of know-how in entrepreneurship
	Further consulting (by side of experts)	
	Indications of political will for implementation	

Source: Authors' systematisation

5. Lessons learned

Four years after the initiation of the work on the pilot sites have passed. In all three cases the process of the development of the development strategies has been completed and in all three cases the local government has formally adopted development strategies.

If pilot cases are considered individually, implementation of the participative methodology and production of development strategy was the most successful in the City of Samobor. One could argue that it is because the city is developed but more important its citizens are aware of their contribution to the development and the fact that development strategy is made for them and future of the city in which they live.

Quite on contrary, in the City of Virovitica general precondition that there must be a democracy in all aspects of everyday life was and even today it is still not accomplished. Virovitica is still dealing with its internal political fights that are strongly affecting all sectors and limiting city development (and this is something that internal city structures must resolve). Selection of the City of Virovitica as the first pilot site today we can comment as not the adequate one, but many lessons have been learned:

1. It is important to select local government unit (LGU) on the basis of the expressed interest of the LGU and not that experts impose their own interest.
2. Consensus must be made so that all interested stakeholders within the LGU are informed about the initiative to produce development document.

3. Local people under supervision on experts should do the SWOT analyses. Local people are more familiar with practical issues and have good insight on local environment. Expert opinion is needed to receive objectiveness of the analysis.
4. The resources needed for implementation of operational plan have to be underpinned with the budget plan or they will never be realised 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. Otherwise, time and resources might be wasted and conflict situations provoked.
5. Regular meetings with all stakeholders are crucial for two reasons: to obtain involvement of all interested parties in all development stages and to be able to promptly react on possible obstacles or withdrawals.
6. Our opinion regarding experts is that their role is only of consultative manner i.e. their role is to direct the process and not to be directly involved into production of the document. Their role is also to act as the initiators of various actions taken, and to be at disposition to local government until they are fully ready to manage the development program on their own.

Experience from the Island of Šolta is interesting because it is an example of vertical co-ordination of work - from Ministry to the local government unit. Since this is the first example of a broadly co-ordinated development strategy, general inexperience of all (ministries, local governments as well as consultants) is the main reason for this very long time lag between local government adoption and central government adoption. However, there are some preliminary observations about the methodological approach. Good sides of the SIDP methodology are seen in:

- Clear structure of necessary steps;
- Flexible approach to elaboration process;
- Participation was fruitful and well accepted;
- Tolerance and democratic discussion can be enhanced through good guidance;
- Creation of a coherent local government management tool; and
- Involvement of local experts gives better insight into current circumstances and problems.

Potentials for improvement are seen in following:

- The elaboration process was considered as too long from the perspective of the local community. A reconsidered estimation shows that the maximum length of the preparation should not exceed 6 months. The time that the Government needs to adopt what has already been adopted on the island escapes any estimation, however.
- Local government officials and professionals lack know-how for assessing real and financial needs and therefore, the necessary communication and networking skills, which reflected many miscalculations in the operational plan.
- The strategic plan was initially not synchronised with local government budget. And the first yearly implementation plan was not synchronised with strategic plan due to the misunderstanding of the local government.
- According to the Decree on SIDP methodology – the MPWRC is the official initiator of elaborating a SIDP, while top down (or external) initiation of Local Development Strategies cause difficulties in accepting ownership of the strategy.

The Šolta pilot also demonstrated how initial difficulties in implementation could be overcome by continuous contacts with the Municipal Council and the mayor and frequent (at least once in two weeks) visits to the island. Initial reluctance has been overcome with direct assistance in first implementation steps. Intensive communication with the mayor finally triggered the actual implementation.

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

Since participative methodology by definition includes intensive contacts with various interested groups, a lesson that experts have learned is that they need to have good communication, as well as moderation and presentation skills. Also, more work is needed on aspects of the improvement of the project cycle management (Dräger, 2002).

If we put this methodology but also any other methodology that relates to the regional development in the Croatian context, it would be more than useful to establish educational facilities where lessons on regional development can be learned, since only one postgraduate program exists on this topic!

General comment on the practical use of participative methodology while producing development strategies is that it has demonstrated to be very powerful tool through which it is possible to target development document to local unit and individuals. Success of the development document can be measured through the level of perception of such document as the own property that participative approach definitely can increase.

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