

**Participation in Transition: the problems and possibilities of
participatory approaches to strategic development
management in three localities in Croatia**

Irena Đokic, idokic@eizg.hr
Nenad Starc, nstarc@eizg.hr
Paul Stubbs, pstubbs@eizg.hr

The Institute of Economics Zagreb,
Trg J F Kennedy 7, HR-10000, Zagreb, Croatia.
tel: +385 1 23 35 700; fax: +385 1 23 10 467

Paper first presented to International Conference on "Local Development and Governance in Central, East and South-East Europe", OECD LEED Trento Centre for Local Development, Trento , Italy 6-8 June 2005

Revised version for publication October 2005

1. Old Practices: alive and kicking

An optimist could argue that Croatian regional policy has started its transition and that the rich history of socialist planning has left some useful experiences and secured a certain level of planning culture and so forth. A pessimist could argue that writing laws and even programmes is easy and that too many conditions have been lacking for their implementation. Socialist planning was methodologically ill conceived. The first ten years of transition brought no experience in terms of monitoring and evaluation, and decisions are still made in the old non-transparent way.

Both views should be taken into account here with a remark that the pessimist could find more evidence to back up his/her statements than the optimist could. New legislation has called for programming in a social and economic environment, stuffed with development documents labelled 'strategic programmes', 'strategies', or 'long term plans'. In the last ten years, they have been prepared at all levels, starting from the national level down to the level of local boards¹. The common characteristic of all these documents is that they do not get implemented and that existing institutions do not seem to care. Since development programming has been called for by both national legislation and EU documents, the current practice of programming requires analysis.

The preparation of a municipal development programme starts with the recognition that usual day-to-day decision-making is no longer acceptable and that the development of the municipality should be managed. This is usually recognised by the mayor and/or a couple of members of the town/municipal board, who in an attempt to solve the problem, usually deduce that they need a strategy. In order to develop a strategy, the mayor searches for a competent person or an institution that might be able to do it for them. He often finds no one in the municipality and ends up in one of the regional centres or most probably in Zagreb, the capital. Since no institution exists at present that could provide relevant guidance, the mayor uses his personal connections and/or randomly gathered information and eventually finds someone who is willing to prepare a strategic document. This may be a consultant or an informal team of consultants, but also a scientific institute, one of the country's five Economics faculties, or a consultancy firm. In the course of the negotiations that follow, the mayor and his/her board members express their development views and proposals, whereas the consultants rarely expose the methodology that they are going to use and simply state that the programme can and will be prepared. After the contract is signed the consultants visit the municipality, gather data, have further talks with the mayor, visit municipal administrators and directors of important local firms and retreat to the capital. After a while (it takes some 6 months to prepare the document) the strategy is completed and delivered to the municipality – and is sometimes followed up by a presentation.

A sample of these documents reveals an almost standard structure. This 'standard' development document starts with an exhaustive and informative exposition of the current situation beginning with the natural characteristics of the area and ending with a description of the municipal economy and social services. Data is often insufficient for a thorough analysis, but this part is nevertheless far better than the rest of the document. Development objectives

¹ The Human Development Report for Croatia 2001, reports on 104 national strategic development documents prepared for the Croatian government, various public utilities and other national institutions since 1991. The production has continued so that since 2001 an additional dozen or so documents were prepared. Strategic development documents at lower levels are equally abundant (Human Development Report Croatia 2001, UNDP, Zagreb 2002).

are taken to be understood universally and are not given much explanation - as a result most of them could apply to almost any municipality in the country. As a consequence, no action plans are developed that state '*who does what, in what time frame, and for how much money*'. Development recommendations are general and addressed to the municipal administration or to some vague unspecified higher governmental level. Recommendations are often stated in passive form (itself awkward in Croatian). A wish list that includes statements such as: 'supportive infrastructure should be improved', 'conditions for faster growth of SME should be secured' and similar are to be found in this last, usually very short, chapter of the programme.

Such an approach is a legacy of socialism. No matter how much this approach is rejected in seminars for local administrators, it still determines the understanding of the development process and its management. Quite a few local development programmes prepared in the 1990s resemble those of their predecessors from the 1970s and even from the 1960s. Most of the programmes of the 1990s, thus, could serve as a justification for decisions that have already been made, but not really as documents on which decisions are to be based.

One of the side effects of the legacy is the lack of institutional analysis. Institutions were not a welcome research subject in socialism and those who undertook programmes carefully avoided questioning the capacity and organisation of those that made decisions. The skills for such an analysis were never developed, and as a result this lack of experience of institutional analysis is felt even today. Institutional Economics is still not taught in Economics faculties and the programmes that specify development measures and assign them to previously analysed institutions are exceptionally rare. Another side effect relates to the municipal budget. It is rarely analysed and almost never examined in connection with the development programme. Even if the programme has stated how much money is needed for its implementation, there is no counterpart in the municipal budget and it remains unclear where the finances will come from.

The mayor and his or her Board are thus left with a document that is of little use. They are left with the same knowledge about what they should do as they had before the strategy was prepared. The mayor soon turns back to their urgent daily problems and continues to do what was previously the reason for searching for a strategy. The document stays on the desk for a while and soon ends up in 'a drawer' as it is commonly put.

Strategies at the national level are prepared in a similar way. The beneficiaries are ministries, state agencies or some sectoral association, whereas on the supply side one finds the same consultants that are usually engaged in the production of municipal strategies. The contracts are bigger and the contract period may exceed one year. The final stage appears to be the same, however. The strategies produced are of little use, just as those prepared for municipalities and counties, and the final destination is again the drawer.

The reasons that this relatively useless activity still goes on are to be found on both sides. Municipal mayors, county prefects and Board/Assembly members are rarely knowledgeable regarding strategic development (but at the same time, they hesitate to rely on advisers). There is no experience and the administration is not skilled enough and, as a rule, not motivated to undertake such work. In addition, the economic environment in which the municipality is supposed to be managed, is in turmoil and is highly unpredictable, so it seems that only day-to-day decision-making, a type of crisis management, remains as a tool. The administration at national level is better off in this respect, but nevertheless it is too often equally non-operational. The state administration has generally proven

to be unable to derive action plans from the strategic documents let alone their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. On the other hand, the consultants responsible for the programmes and strategies are not around when it comes to the implementation of these strategies. The contract expires when the document is delivered. Consultants charge their fees and leave, while the administration is left alone at the moment when consultations are needed most.

Even the optimists cannot claim that such strategy production ever implied real participation neither in socialism nor in the first decade of transition. Socialism in Croatia bore a self-management label which by definition implied participation. It was largely fictional, however. At best it existed as *ex post* participatory public hearings on the occasion of the preparation of physical plans. The occasion of the preparation of so-called socio-economic plans (municipal, regional and national) was never used to obtain development views or derive the development interests of those affected by the plan². The fact that the plan has to be adopted in the municipal assembly i.e. by those that were democratically mandated to do so, was considered sufficient. The fact that in a one party system democratic voting is preceded by non democratic selection of candidates was not considered relevant to the matter.

The first decade of Croatian transition brought no changes to this. The new post-socialist state was established by means of a multi-party political system introduced by the withering socialist state, but participation in the political system was not reflected in economic decision-making. The development practice in which the list of participants in socio-economic decision-making boils down to the mayor, a couple of council members and a couple of consultants can hardly be called participation. After almost a half of century of socialism which had participation written on its flags and a decade of transition which brought back citizens' rights, it had to be imported from the countries which in socialist times had been considered as non-participatory.

2. Enter the Ex-Patriates

It would be a distortion of the truth to argue that the agents of this development planning, during the age of socialism, were always domestic. Nevertheless, the explosion of external agencies and consultants seeking to intervene in local development management occurred in the early 1990s when transition corresponded with war and humanitarian emergency. The early years were not, at all, dominated by a sustainable development perspective, much less by a participatory approach. Rather, the foreigners' focus on humanitarian relief and the provision of shelter led to two contradictory relationships with local politicians and policy makers. One approach tended to ignore them, working through international and local NGOs, bypassing even the central government and, in essence, establishing a parallel system of support and of infrastructure (Harrell-Bond, 1993).³ The other worked with local authorities but tended, in the context of the need for rapid implementation and immediate results, to limit consultations to a small circle of powerful politicians, and to utilise 'connections' to ensure that projects began on time and achieved their results, akin to a kind of 'technocratic clientelism' (cf. Tendler, 2000; Braathen, 2005). The external need to get things

² Neither is it the case that business decisions in self-managed firms were arrived at in a participatory manner. This point needs further elaboration and a paper much longer than this one. It is a pity that research on ex-socialism is not "in" nowadays in transition countries. Eyewitnesses will be soon gone and references lost.

³ A Governmental Office for NGOs established to coordinate this, became operational no sooner than 1998. Quite a few foreign donors and agencies still tend to ignore it.

done simply reconciled itself with the internal emphasis on the informal and the possibility of turning adversity to one's personal advantage.

Towards the end of the 1990s more complex arrangements between those who commissioned programmes and agents implementing them developed, focused on longer-term questions of economic and social development, democratisation, and the building of capacity. On many occasions, these turned out to be just new labels for the same wine in the same bottles, with donors, national and local politicians, and implementers complicit in the presentation of one after another project as a 'success' without any significant impact on institutional practices nor, indeed, on the well-being of the wider population. The amount of documents in drawers grew incrementally, thicker because they were now almost compulsorily presented in two languages, with Croatian translators and intermediaries, especially those conversant in the strange language of 'project English', experiencing a concomitant increase in their importance and value.

Despite a large inflow of external experts, and not inconsiderable in-flows of money, albeit much of which flowed equally quickly out again in the pockets of foreign consultants and in the 'tied' nature of some infrastructure investment clauses, little in the way of good practice was genuinely transferred, much less was any new discourse or practice created, merging the Croatian context and circumstances with best international experiences. Models and frameworks from abroad⁴, were carried in the heads of foreign consultants, working through skilled local intermediaries, and transplanted root and branch in Croatian soil, only to wither and die or turn into a hybrid totally unlike the original plant.

A small group of cognates (those in the loop) learnt certain situational logics fast – how to read and respond to requests for assistance (RFAs); how to speak diverse truths to diverse audiences; how to understand the different interests and key mandates of a range of international agencies; often working with multiple identities and shifting organisational forms (local-international; public-private; formal-informal; state agency-academic institution-NGO-consultancy company). Workshops and study tours began to be the technologies of choice of the new development elite, taking their place alongside feasibility studies, logical frameworks, and evaluation reports based on dubious assumptions and maximising particularistic interests. In the process, dualities of 'modern'/ 'traditional'; urban/rural; expert/practitioner; centre/periphery; and advanced/underdeveloped, already present in the previous era, were amplified and reproduced in new forms. All actors, donors, implementers, local and national politicians, academics, NGOs and so on, played their parts well, stuck to their scripts, were careful never to speak out of place, so that the play became predictable, routine, and rarely, if ever, had an audience, much less an audience moved to get on stage itself, and begin to act and change things.

3. Taking Our Time: new contexts, new initiatives

After almost a decade of this, something changed. Like all such changes, it was at first barely perceptible. In retrospect its causes are both contextual and coincidental. Contextually, the end of the war in Croatia and the assertion of full Croatian sovereignty began to lead to a thawing of relationships internationally and a gradual normalisation of political society. The end of a decade of rule by one political party in a multiparty system in 2000, and the building of a

⁴ Usually, these models and frameworks were not from neighbouring countries with similar problems but were, rather, those prepared by agents from the overdeveloped world and implemented, originally, in the under-developed world. The often heard cry 'Croatia is not Africa' could have been responded to by the more complex phrase 'in this sense, Africa is not Africa either'.

consensual political goal around membership of the European Union, allowed for the posing of questions of development, albeit in the context of significant demographic change and growing inequalities in income and in human and social capital. Internally, a rhetoric of decentralisation and subsidiarity rested alongside a continued centralised state, with considerable political and administrative resistance to reform.

Externally, the themes and the nature of assistance changed. At last it became more long-term, more developmentally oriented, and predicated on the building of partnerships for institutional change. Large grants for parallel provision became a thing of the past and, instead, a combination of loans and external advisors, from the outside, began to relate more meaningfully with internal actors within Ministries, newly founded agencies, and non-state actors. The new buzz words were of 'regional and local development', 'small and medium enterprises', 'clusters', 'community mobilisation', 'social advocacy', and 'income generation'. Within this, a space was created, for the first time, for more emphasis on strategic development planning.

In addition, the 1990s had seen, globally, a considerable shift within leading development agencies, with an emphasis on governance, institutional change, stakeholder involvement and, above all, 'participation', with the last concept moving from the margins of particular progressive INGOs and social movements to become a central part of the rhetoric, and to an extent reality, of programming by the World Bank, USAID and so on. In the process, of course, "participation' no longer has the radical connotations it once had" (Mosse, 2001, 17). Obviously, something of a critical edge is lost when one of the main messages of the many manuals and toolkits which followed this entry into the mainstream states that 'citizen participation is a management tool and contributes to better effectiveness in management' (Urban Institute, 2003; 5). However, the fact that participation entered the mainstream discourse and practices, led to a sea-change in the way in which projects related to local authorities, with much greater emphasis than previously on processes of change, on transparency and on accountability.

The growth of a kind of 'cognitive Europeanisation'⁵, in which a vision of a Europe committed to regional development combined with a practical sense that, should the right choices be made, Croatia could benefit considerably from European Union funding and programmes, led to a different set of projects and commitments. Importantly, the European Union itself, learning lessons from the Eastern European accession process, also began to concentrate on Croatia less in terms of a reconstruction agenda and more in terms of a development agenda (Hauser, 2003).

A small number of projects began to be framed much more in terms of flexible programming, genuine partnerships between a small number of external actors and diverse internal stakeholders, and crucially more of a process orientation in which, instead of an obsession with 'successful' outcomes, learning through doing and the importance of reflexivity and the creation of feedback mechanisms were emphasised. They all focused on local self-government which appeared the most suitable environment for such efforts. One such programme was launched in a co-operation between the German agency Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the Institute of Economics in Zagreb (EIZ). It started in 2000 with the explicit aims of building local capacity for development planning, introducing a participatory approach to local development planning and disseminating the corresponding methodology across the Croatian municipalities and towns on the one hand and through the rapidly growing professional group of

⁵ 'Cognitive Europeanization' is "the incorporation of the EU discourse ... into national ... discourse, preferences and aspirations" (Guillén and Álvarez, 2004: 298).

local consultants on the other. In the three years that followed, a rather small group of Croatian and German experts produced a small number of pilot local strategic development programmes, published corresponding guidelines, established an Internet portal (<http://www.regio-hr.com>) and held numerous seminars and workshops. A somewhat intense experience, partly concerning participation, was gathered, and it is this we reflect on here, with no claims to objectivity which would have come from detached observation of the processes noted.

3.1. The town of Virovitica

In the beginning of 2001, GTZ and EIZ searched for the first municipality or town to prepare a strategic development programme for. They finally approached the mayor and a couple of members of the Town Board of the town of Virovitica (a town in Slavonia, at the edge of the war zone near the border with Hungary, 170 km², 22,500 inhabitants). GTZ and EIZ experts proposed the preparation of a strategic development programme in a new participatory way, stressing the fact that the programme cost would be covered externally and requiring an official statement about the willingness of the town structures to commit themselves to such an endeavour. Faced with an offer that they had no reason to refuse⁶, the Town Board decided on preparation of the programme, and offered assistance in terms of data collection and organisational matters. In February 2001, GTZ and EIZ searched for, and eventually engaged, a small group of town administrators and experts from the County Institute for Physical Planning and sub-contracted the preparation of separate structural analyses of the town's economy, social services, environmental protection system, physical planning mechanisms, and of the institutions responsible for development management. The contractors began their analysis in March and accomplished their tasks by September.

In October 2001, representatives of the interest groups identified in the course of the analysis were invited to two workshops where development problems and goals were arrived at in a fully participatory manner. The workshops were a 'social success': everyone took an active part in discussions, the atmosphere was excellent and the list of goals that the participants arrived at was quite convincing. Not all the interest groups had their representatives at the workshops, however. Large local firms, health care personnel and members of the judiciary were not represented and their opinions had to be deduced by interviews and local experts' estimates. An action plan containing a long list of measures based on the goals defined on the workshops was completed by December 2001 including a draft programme for the period from 2002 to 2005. A public hearing started on 17 December 2001 and lasted until 25 January 2002. A rather thin pile of written comments and amendments that arrived were considered by the GTZ and EIZ experts and the draft was ready for adoption by the end of January 2002. On 18 February 2002 the Town Council of Virovitica adopted the Programme and committed the mayor to its implementation. The Action Plan for 2002 contained all the information that the mayor and his team might have needed to start implementing the programme: every measure had a responsible institution defined; the priorities and time spans were set; and the required finances were estimated.

No implementation ever commenced, however. In addition, the mayor was forced to resign a couple of months later, which caused what is, in Croatia, the usual domino effect and more than half of the administrators that took part in the preparation of the strategic programme were dismissed. The new mayor brought his own crew but showed no interest in the programme. In visits which GTZ and

⁶ 'All external assistance is welcome' was a frequently heard mantra in those days.

EIZ paid to the town administration in 2002 and 2004, it was clear that there had been no progress. The programme was remembered well by those that took part in its preparation but the new brooms did not even know which drawer the document had been put in. Ownership of the programme, a category warranted so much by foreign consultants, was not achieved. Local politicians usually started meetings with GTZ and EIZ experts with the same sentence, beginning: 'Your programme.....'

3.2. The town of Samobor

Bearing in mind the Virovitica experience GTZ and EIZ experts decided to wait for a bottom-up, or demand-driven, initiative rather than approaching another town or municipality. It did not take long. In November 2001 the Town Council of Samobor (a town near Zagreb, 250 km², 35,000 inhabitants) established a development council of 15 Samoborians with the task of formulating a development strategy. In January 2002 the most active members of the Council contacted the Central Government Office for the Development Strategy where they learned about recent GTZ and EIZ efforts and the contact was soon established. A co-operation was agreed on in which Samoborians had to take an active part in the analysis of the town's economy, social services, environmental protection, physical planning and development institutions, while GTZ and EIZ experts undertook the role of methodological co-ordinators and *ex-ante* evaluators. The Council members were paid from the town budget and the analysis started already in January 2002. It was accomplished early in March 2002, so that the workshops were conducted towards the end of the month. They were socially even more successful than in Virovitica but also better attended and full of information about projects in progress. At this stage it was already obvious that the already well-developed town of Samobor was not starting from scratch but needed to organise its development activities better. Discussions about measures started in March and ended in August 2002 with a draft development programme for the period 2002 - 2012 and an action plan for the period 2002 - 2004. On 6 September 2002 a public hearing was launched with presentations in local boards, posters, weekly radio-talks and copies of the draft all over town. It was closed on 25 October and experts and council members faced quite a pile of written comments and proposals. Towards the end of November 2002 the Town Board and then the Town Council adopted the Strategic Development Programme together with the 2003 town budget. Two months later the implementation seemed threatened by the mayor's resignation but it soon appeared that the town administration started to implement measures nevertheless. In summer 2003 sporadic meetings with various town administrators revealed that two thirds of the programme measures were being implemented. It turned out that almost 80% of all measures and projects had begun to be implemented already in 2002 and that the programme was praised as the first development document that managed to embrace everything that was going on across town departments, public utilities and some 40 local boards.

Samoborians never discussed the programme implementation structure much. It was assumed that existing departments and public services would know what to do. They did 'own' the programme. As for the politicians, the new mayor did not seem to care as much as his predecessor but the opposition did. Quite a few attacks and calls for resignations heard in council sessions in the year 2003 were based on claimed failures of 'those in power' to implement this and that element of the programme. As for the large firms there was not a single hint that they read the programme let alone implemented it. Like in Virovitica and anywhere else that GTZ & EIZ experts got involved in the local development, those responsible for most of the employment, most of the town's GDP and most often for the greatest part of the environmental degradation did not participate in

anything at all. In Samobor, this was particularly crucial as one important company was able to utilise its contacts to ensure that elements of the programme which ran counter to its interests were never implemented.

3.3. The island municipality of Šolta and other islands

Another Croatian municipality was approached by the GTZ/EIZ team but the context was quite different. This was the island municipality of Šolta (an island 9 NM away from the Dalmatian town of Split, 58 km², 1300 islanders) while the context was given by the National Island Development Programme adopted by the Croatian Parliament in 1997, and the Island Act passed in 1999. The Act prescribes the preparation of Sustainable Island Development Programmes (SIDPs) covering 26 Croatian islands/groups of islands and 14 State Island Programmes (SIPs), as well as the Annual Island Programme containing inputs for the national budget proposal for the next year. The structure given by SIDPs and SIPs implies full bottom up - top down relations and resembles ROPs and SOPs which have become almost compulsory development documents in the EU. This structure was attractive enough to get involved in and GTZ and EIZ approached the municipality and the Ministry in charge for regional and in particular island development simultaneously.

The Ministry agreed that the first SIDP ever be prepared on the island of Šolta and so did the municipality. GTZ and EIZ experts disembarked on the island for the first time in April 2001, but had to wait another month and a half because the mayor who agreed to the preparation of the programme lost the municipal elections. Towards the end of May 2001, after the elections, the new mayor readily accepted the proposition and the group of experts started to analyse the island in June 2001. An expert in physical planning was found on the island and sub-contracted. Others had to be looked for in Split and Zagreb. The analysis was accomplished in September 2001 and the usual set of economic, social, environmental, physical planning and institutional reports was delivered. Towards the end of September 2001, workshops were held and representatives of island interest groups as well as the representatives of the Ministry in charge discussed problems and defined development goals and the development vision. The contracted experts and the mayor worked on measures until December 2002 and on 22 December 2001 the public hearing was called. It ended on 25 January 2002 with just a written comment or two so that the experts could easily prepare the final draft. On 27 January 2002 the Municipal Council adopted the Programme for the period of 2004 - 2007 and passed it to the Ministry for further procedure, while the mayor started implementing the programme. The further procedure implied adoption by the Croatian Government which would have made Šolta's sustainable development programme the first local development document adopted on two management levels and having introduced the top down - bottom up approach in practice.

This did happen but no less than 22 months later on 21 November 2003. The new brooms in the Ministry in charge that replaced the old ones after the elections in January 2004 responded somewhat more quickly and appointed a specific administrator to implement the first SIDP. The implementation started with difficulties and soon came to a stand still. The mayor tried what he could while the appointed administrator tried nothing so that the usual routine of visiting Zagreb and asking for development money continued.

The ownership of Šolta's SIDP was vested solely in the person of mayor. The rest of the islanders that attended the workshops as well as the nine existing island municipal administrators were detached from any implementation so that the first Croatian SIDP has been making its way very slowly. Meetings with the mayor in

2003 and 2004 showed that the measures and projects from the programme were implemented way behind schedule and without necessary state support. In the course of all these years the only large firm on the island has been increasing its hotel capacities without any reference to the programme. Needless to say, they never attended workshops nor have they ever participated in any other aspect of the strategic development programme.

4. An Interim Report Card

A lot was observed in the course of the three years of attempts to introduce improved development planning in Croatia. The most promising observation is that most of the experts and those who were hired by experts learned rapidly and mastered the elements of the new methodology well. In spring 2004 the Ministry in charge of island development contracted 8 consultancy firms to prepare the remaining 25 sustainable island development programmes. Given the fact that they were all first timers, the task was accomplished quite successfully and the number of able consultants increased considerably.

While Croatian consultants, mayors and others involved in preparation of the programmes felt quite comfortable when it came to analysis, participation proposed by the ex-patriates was a new issue. It has been offered as a part of the overall development methodology and, as an approach, appeared unquestionable. It was clear that any democratic approach to strategic development decision making necessarily leads to the proposition that no one should do it but 'the people'. Participation, thus, seems to secure a minimal development consensus which is the least that one would expect from the system that came to replace socialism. As a methodological tool, participation has been offered in the form of gatherings of representatives of interest groups (now called stakeholders) in order to arrive at development problems and goals. However, the three pilot programmes revealed some difficulties in the approach and quite a few problems concerning the use of the tool.

4.1. The Pilots observed

The workshops that were conducted in the course of preparing the programmes did refresh the existing way of producing development documents. Each and every workshop was a lively social event which revealed the ability of local people to deal with development issues and propose solutions. This social success was coupled with some shortcomings, however. First of all it was obvious at the very beginning that information flows amongst all that were involved in the programme development were insufficient and that the existing communication culture is inappropriate. Participants were told about ties and feedback mechanisms that should exist between the analysis and the formulation of problems; between the formulation of problems and the way one formulates goals; and so on, but only a little of this information were passed on and utilised. This happened mainly because the existing approach to development planning relies on already understood, ready made, goals that no one really questions so that the analysis chapter of the programme part stands apart as information to the reader rather than as a basis for the formulation of problems and goals. Participants thus stated goals without reference to the analysis, formulated measures without regard to the overall development context that was arrived at in workshops, and so on; whereas the consultants kept delivering copies of the analytical papers assuming that they would be read systematically and critically. Participants sometimes stuck to their own scripts, without paying too much attention to other participants' proposals, even when measures proposed were

obviously mutually exclusive or when the same money was earmarking for more than one project.

This led to workshop results which were 'non-robust' as statisticians would put it. It appeared that workshops guarantee the grassroots character of every problem and goal stated, and that everything that is stated is indeed a problem which may even cause amendment to the previous analysis. However, workshops do not guarantee that all the problems that come out from the analysis will be stated. In addition, little or no account is taken of the possible absence of key interest groups. If particular representatives do not show up at a workshop, their absence is rarely commented on, much less compensated for. When some important representatives are missing – as happened regarding firms and health care institutions - the workshop results are very questionable. As a tool, workshops thus appear necessary but not sufficient. The danger of 'workshop fetishism' in which the nature of the 'success' of gathering people together to talk is overplayed, is a serious problem in participatory development programmes.

Despite the use of the term above, some of the 'representatives' of particular interest groups tended to also pursue their own, personalised, agendas, and appeared either unable or unwilling to pursue the broader interests of the group they represented, much less to engage in compromises, conflict resolution and alliance-building. Again, selection of these 'representatives' tended to be left to, and therefore reinforce the power of, the mayor. Lack of experience in these issues tended to lead to a 'trust in the process' of workshops by the consultants and a reluctance to interfere.

Foreseen weaknesses in institutional analysis proved even more constraining than expected. Croatian consultants appeared unskilled in institutional analysis and could not pass much to equally unskilled local experts sub-contracted to actually undertake the analysis. Analysis of actual decision-making processes, power structures, and formal and informal lines of responsibility, were uncharted, with the institutional analysis chapters reduced to description of various jurisdictions and prerogatives copy-pasted from various by-laws and statutes. One of the most important features, the gap between mayors who take on development tasks, and take care of external contacts on one hand and municipal administrators whose work is reduced to everyday routine activities in the other, was overlooked in all programmes. On the island of Šolta, this led to a false conclusion about administrators' participation later in the implementation of the programme.

The content of the analysis was much wider and better structured than in usual Croatian products of the same kind but it still missed any rigorous stakeholder analysis. The impact of stakeholders, their importance in decision-making and their willingness and ability to participate were not analysed, with problematic consequences in terms of workshop and programme outcomes. Essentially, stakeholders were simply listed and the same invitations sent to all. This 'false equality' clearly acted as a disincentive for some important stakeholders. More focused analysis would have predicted that some key stakeholders would not show up unless or until their participation was approached differently.

The problem of the disjunct between political interests and local bureaucratic administration was noted above. The role of local politicians and the problematic over-politicisation of their interest in development programmes also had important, though largely unforeseen, consequences. In each and every pilot, individual political figures, tending to personalise power, followed their own interests and tended to use the preparation and adoption for their own, short-term, political ends. However, in no case did the political momentum continue after adoption, there being no significant political kudos from successful

implementation. The complexities, then, of the relationship between personal power, political opportunity and interest, and the bureaucratic imperatives of local civil servants, were not addressed, much less the very different pace and time scales involved in political and bureaucratic survival.

4.2. Defining participation

On reflection, it is clear that the ex-patriates brought 'participation' to Croatian strategic development as a self-understood buzz word which matched no practical experience in Croatia. The socialist legacy either did not encompass participation or, in so far as it had such a rhetoric, this had negative consequences in terms of the renewed encounter with the term. In addition, in the context of war and a renewed centralised government, rhetorically seeking to unify 'the people' but rarely practising participatory democracy, there was no internal regeneration of the concept, either.

In this 'contact zone' of conceptual 'import-export' (Clifford, 1997), there was no shared understanding of participation, much less any nuanced definition beyond the trivial - participation means that everybody should take part in the development process; and the simplistic: participation is achieved through a couple of workshops.

Other crude dichotomies tended to be produced in this process, too: that between a 'cult of experts', on the one hand and a 'deskilling of expertise' on the other. In addition, external experts tended not to think through their own position, role and interests, preferring to think of themselves as outside the process when, clearly, whether they chose it fully or not, they were inside it.

Often, no distinction was made between the principle of participation and the pragmatic practicalities. In addition, the need to distinguish between different types of participation (perhaps in terms of a hierarchy or ladder of participation, such as that developed initially by Arnstein, 1969), in which different types are applicable to different stakeholders, at different stages of the development of a programme, was something learnt through practice rather than a priori given. More sophisticated stakeholder and institutional analyses are, therefore, crucial prerequisites for determining the obstacles to effective participation, to minimising the risk of undue influence by particular stakeholders at each stage: of preparation, of adoption, and of implementation of the programme.

Participation is, therefore, more than a workshop or two. It implies a no less rigorous, triangulated, multi-faceted, methodology including interviews, surveys, focus groups, and continuous dialogue and reflection at each stage. Inclusive development is, therefore, a process in which no one interest dominates, and in which diverse, sometimes conflicting, interests are named, worked on, and resolved. If this occurs in ways in which even those who lose offer a degree of support, and a view that the process was 'fair', then a separation of powers is legitimate and necessary. Modelling participatory governance in which diverse interest groups reveal problems and define goals; the entire community is consulted; various experts and professionals define the raft of potential measures; administrators implement policies in the most effective and efficient manner possible; and politicians support the programme development in all phases, take an active part in implementation, and bear political consequences, is, perhaps, a more realistic and yet sufficiently ambitious, goal for such programmes.

Alongside participation, then, the other buzz word of 'empowerment', necessitating a sophisticated understanding of power, not as a fixed asset, but as

a set of complex social, political and economic relations, needs to be addressed and worked with in an equally nuanced fashion. Without this, strategic development programmes can reinforce the status quo, reward the most articulate groups, the already developed and high skilled municipalities. An over-emphasis on seeking to change power relations risks non-implementation, a loss of credibility, and a reinforcement of informal, non-accountable methods and mechanisms. In either case, greater attention to a rights-based approach to strategic development programming is clearly needed (cf. UN OHCHR, 2002)

4.3. What is to be done

Being a kind of an interim report this text does not offer solutions but, rather, through intensive engagement with case examples, has sought to emphasise the importance of learning through doing, and the development of mid-range concepts, theories, and practical ways forward based on specific cases and contexts. 'What is to be done' or, rather, what can be done in terms of the next steps towards a better development management practice in Croatia can be deduced from the lessons learnt so far. They can be summarised briefly.

Firstly, different types of participation need to be promoted for different stakeholders, at different stages in a development programme. This does not mean, however, that participation can be turned on and off at will; it should be continuous throughout the process of preparation, consultation, adoption and implementation of a programme. The use of a development matrix seeking to understand the relationship between stakeholders and phases is a useful tool here.

Secondly, programmes which promote participation can bridge the gap between, and transform, (over) politicisation and (over) bureaucratisation, relating both to wider interests and an overall 'public good'. This suggests, in fact, that development programmes stand or fall by the ways in which they understand, and promote, good governance, and ensure that institutional and other blockages are addressed and dealt with effectively.

Thirdly, consultants are stakeholders too: the knowledge and skills they have, or should have, oblige them to take an active part in decision making, although there is a need to avoid imposing their solutions. More training in process issues, in facilitation, mediation and conflict resolution, needs to go alongside training and capacity building in some of the more obvious analytical tools.

Fourthly, participation as a methodological tool needs to be constantly worked on and improved, alongside or, rather, in an inter-relationship with, improved institutional analysis and stakeholder analysis. In the end, the linkages between these three tools is crucial in bridging the gap between analysis, formulation and implementation.

Fifthly, de-mystifying participation involves disseminating models of good practice to local administrators and politicians as well as amongst local consultants, themselves growing in number and importance and with a need for new skills.

Sixthly, participation does not fit easily with short-term programming eager to achieve quickly demonstrable successes. At its best, participatory development is no less strategic nor any less requiring management or 'steering' than any other kind of development. Above all, it makes all of us 'subjects' of development, with active agency, rather than objects or beneficiaries. It involves a journey, and learning, in which there are shared, but also, different, opportunities and constraints.

In the end, one lesson appears to be particularly important. Pilot programmes that were offered to mayors and their boards to be accepted as a free ride failed in implementation whereas those that were asked for, demand driven as it were, survived the critical time after the adoption and got implemented, sometimes without major reference to the external assistance itself⁷. The estimation of the readiness and willingness of the chosen municipality/town to get involved in preparation and later in implementation of the programme appears crucial. No consultant should disregard the fact that it takes two sides for efficient consulting and that a mayor's acceptance to receive a free of charge programme from consultants from the country's capital is not enough. The need for development management has to be recognised by all as well as the necessity of implementation of what has been arrived at in a participatory manner.

⁷ cf. Sirolli (1999) for the clearest statement of this, by now, familiar lesson which, however, does not rest easily with the demands of donors.

References

- Arnstein, S. (1969) 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', in *J. of the American Planning Association* 35 (4); 216-224.
- Braathen, E. (2005) 'Social Funds in Africa: a technocratic-clientelistic response to poverty', in Cimadamore, A. et al (eds.) *The Poverty of the State: reconsideration of the role of the state in the struggle against global poverty*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO; 289-314.
- Clifford, J. (1997) *Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Guillén, A. M., and Álvarez, S., (2004), "The EU's impact on the Spanish welfare state: the role of cognitive Europeanization". *Journal of European Social Policy* 14 (3), 285-299.
- Harrell-Bond, B. (1993) 'Relief: from dependency to development?', in *War Report* 22; 8-9.
- Hauser, F. (2003) EC Support to Regional Development in Croatia, November. Unpublished m/s.
- Human Development Report - Croatia 2001 (2002), UNDP, Zagreb, Institute of Economics Zagreb
- Mosse, D. (2001) 'People's Knowledge, Participation and Development', in Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (eds.) *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books; 16-35.
- Program održivog razvoja otoka Šolte 2003, Šolta - Zagreb (*Sustainable Development Programme for the island of Šolta*)
- Sirolli, E. (1999) *Ripples from the Zambezi: passion, entrepreneurship and the rebirth of local economies*. British Columbia: New Society Publishers.
- Strateški program razvoja Grada Virovitice (2001), Virovitica (*Strategic Development Programme for the Town Of Virovitica*)
- Strateški program razvoja Grada Samobora, (2002), Samobor (*Strategic Development Programme for the Town Of Samobor*)
- Tendler, J. (2000) 'Why Are Social Funds So Popular?' in Shahid, Y. et al (eds.) *Local Dynamics in the Era of Globalization*. Oxford: University Press; 114-129.
- UN OHCHR (2002) *Human Rights in Development*. Web: <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches-04.htm>
- Urban Institute (2003) *Citizen Participation Manual*. Local Government Reform Project, web: http://isite23.isite.com.hr/Download/2005/02/16/Citizen_Participation_Manual_EN.pdf