Local Public Participation in Europe
Case Studies from Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Belgium

Action and Reflection for Engaged Citizens

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Foreword

The respect of human rights was not the goal of the European Union (EU) construction hence this task stayed and still remains to be fulfilled by national governments. The European Charter of Fundamental Rights emphasizes the role of national structures in the protection of human rights.

Nevertheless, no one imagines that infringement of human rights within the EU will be overlooked or ignored by European institutions. This is especially the case in the last years when we could witness the rise of xenophobic phenomena in the context of the economic crisis throughout Europe: “Our findings show that across the EU the economic crisis has led to an increasing focus on internal politics rather than a broader European perspective.”¹

In addition, “Policies in all areas have focused almost entirely on economic competitiveness. […] The effects have been felt at all levels, challenging the sustainability of policies and practices that have previously supported the participation and engagement of citizens in decision making.”²

Moreover, in the former communist countries, fragile institutions and a legal framework which still plays the role of a formality, the respect of human and citizens’ rights becomes problematic and fighting corruption, especially at local level, is still a fight to be fought. Within the project “Action and Reflection for Engaged Citizens”³ funded through the Europe for Citizens programme of the European Union, NGOs and citizens groups from new and old member states joined in order to research public participation in the EU and also practice together active citizenship. They are those local groups and NGOs who hold accountable public authorities and ask for more democracy.

This brochure is the result of the research of different practices or forms of public participation in Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Belgium. Together they show how much has been done in these countries in terms of democratization and how much is still to be done. The European Union cannot be the missing link of the democratization processes in any of its member states, while at the same time respecting its competencies and principles such as subsidiarity⁴. One way for the European Union to achieve this is to encourage and support local vibrant communities.

² Idem.
³ The Resource Centre for public participation (www.ce-re.ro) was the leading partner of the project “Action and Reflection for Engaged Citizens”. The NGO partners contributing to the current research are Unit for Social Innovation and Research – Shipyard (Poland), Centre for Community Organizing – CKO (Slovakia) and think tank Pour la Solidarité (Belgium).
⁴ Subsidiarity is one of the main principles of European construction which means decisions are to be made as close to citizens as possible. It recognizes the role of national and local institutions and allows the European Union to intervene only when policy objectives can be met through a European-level regulation.
Theoretical and methodological aspects

Any reference to public participation necessarily alludes to a wider discussion about democracy, understood both in its theoretical underpinnings and its empirical manifestations. There is little or no disagreement that participation of citizens is beneficial for a democratic setting since it maintains the necessary linkages between citizens and elites and it sustains the latter’s responsiveness towards people’s needs and grievances.

Certainly, participation can embrace many forms, from voting in national elections, to contesting specific decisions of local authorities. The political aspects of participation are not always explicit; however, to the extent that all decisions are circumscribed to a wider political context, citizen participation is always consequential, whether for determining the composition of government through voting or for affecting a local public decision through lobbying. Participation then is necessarily linked to individuals' and groups’ involvement in decisions or their attempt to influence the course of action pursued by authorities with decision-making power.

In this line, a very general definition of public participation designates this process as “the practice of consulting and involving members of the public in the agenda-setting, decision-making and policy-forming activities of organizations or institutions responsible for policy development” (Rowe and Frewer, 2004: 512).

Within a practice-oriented perspective, the International Association for Public Participation lists the following features of the public participation process: “The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives; Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision; The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants; The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected; The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate; The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way; The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision” (as quoted by Creighton, 2005: 8).

In The Public Participation Handbook, Creighton (2005) discusses several merits of public participation, which provides potential benefits for both the affected publics and the authorities who initiate or implement a measure or a program. Thus, seen from the perspective of the affected communities, public participation is a useful process of “ensuring that those who make decisions that affect people’s lives have a dialogue with that public before making those decisions” (p.17). In other words, public participation entails an important component of empowerment, as people feel their voice is taken into account in the final decisions. The benefits are mutual, for authorities as well as for the public affected by the decision making processes leading to positive consequences. Such effects relate to the potential of public participation to provide “a means by which contentious issues can be resolved” and of being “a way of reassuring the public that all viewpoints are being considered” (p. 17).

According to the same author, additional specific benefits entailed by the use of public participation in the decision making processes include: improved quality of decisions minimizing cost and delay, consensus building, increased ease of implementation, maintaining credibility and legitimacy, better informed publics. (Creighton, 2005: 18-19)
Even if, from this pragmatic perspective public participation may seem merely instrumental, as targeting specific objectives and outcomes, as a process, it still retains its democratic virtues. Ortwin et al (1993: 210) argue in this regard: “Beyond the necessity of resolving conflicts and finding ‘good’ solutions, participation is also an expression of our political culture. Technocratic decision-making is incompatible with democratic ideals. The involvement of affected parties represents the political values of government by the people, not just for the people. If we take the ideal of democracy seriously, public participation is a normative prerequisite.”

Indeed, few voices will rise against the idea that stands for the importance of public participation in decision-making in a democratic system. Still, during the last decades, certain aspects related to public participation, empowerment and involvement of the citizens in the policy or decision making process have raised fierce and heated debates. The sources of these debates are coming from the different understandings of citizens’ public participation. Indeed, there is a critical difference between going through the false ritual of participation and having the real power needed to interfere in the decision-making process.

Several typologies of public participation can be identified in the academic literature. One of these typologies was introduced by Sherry Arnstein (1969) and used as criteria for the differentiation of the actual power citizens have in the decision-making process. Arnstein used the analogy of a ladder in order to very explicitly envisage the actual differences among different types of public participation. At the bottom part of the ladder are (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy. These two describe levels of "non-participation" that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Levels 3 and 4 progress to levels of minimum effort from the authorities’ side that allows the citizens to hear and to have a voice: (3) Informing and (4) Consultation. Still, in these contexts, citizens lack the power and channels to insure that their views are taken into consideration. The next type of participation (5) Placation allows the citizens to give advice, but still retains the right to decide in the hands of the authorities. Further, citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in the policy-making process. At the top, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control allow citizens to have full power.

A more recent debate in the public participation literature focuses on increasingly complex criteria like: rules and channels of citizens’ involvement in decision-making processes, strategies used by citizens or groups of citizens to approach and intervene in the decision-making processes or types of interactions between the actors involved in the decision-making process. In this context, recent typologies of citizen participation are analyzed in contexts like: collaborative governance vs. contentious politics.

Over the last two decades, a new strategy of governing called “collaborative governance” has developed. Carmen Sirianni (2009) defined this new concept as: “the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres, in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished”. To be sure, collaborative governance does not refer only to consultation but it implies a two-way communication and influence between agencies and stakeholders and also opportunities for stakeholders to talk to each other. All stakeholders must be directly and equally engaged in all stages of the decision-making. In other words, in the ideal type, all whose interests will be affected take part in the decision-making process; there is an institutionalization of democracy through participation and a practical
empowerment of the public. Still, besides the ideal type, different levels of cooperation can be identified among the actors in decision-making processes (Morgan, 2010).

On the other side, contentious politics has come to replace social movements, as the term used to describe the phenomenon of organized social resistance to hegemonic norms. Contentious politics refers to concerted (forms of contestation in which individuals and groups organize and ally to push for social change that challenge hegemonic norms), counter-hegemonic social and political actions, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternatives (Leitner and Sziarto, 2008).

This contentious (conflictual) approach to politics and decision-making emerges in response to changes in political opportunities and constraints, with participants responding to a variety of incentives: material and ideological, partisan and group-based, long-lasting and episodic. The contentious approach to public participation in decision-making refers to the creation of channels of participation through mobilizing people into campaign and coalitions of collective action in a process where citizens don’t have real means of intervening. Still, as Leitner and Sziarto (2008) wrote, not all politics is contentious. In conclusion, contentious politics is mainly defined as being public, collective, but mostly episodic, meaning that it is not a permanent state of public participation.

Considering the theoretical assumptions briefly presented above, the present study locates the public participation instances analyzed in the case studies on a continuum defined by the two different theoretical approaches of public participation: collaborative and contentious. Moreover, we are interested in assessing the democratic potential of these various forms of public participation from the collaborative – contentious continuum. As mentioned above, public participation has become the focus of recent approaches to public decision-making. In this respect, it became an integral part of public decision-making processes in many European countries. Indeed, since the end of the 1990s there has been an explosion in small-scale experiments with new modes of institutional forms of public participation. Still, less attention has actually been given to the assessment of their democratic potential and qualities. Consequently, democratic assessments of these various forms of public participation in decision-making processes are rather embryonic.

It is very important to note that democratic assessments are different from normal policy process evaluations, or public policy analysis, where policy is measured against its goals or objectives. Moreover, a democratic assessment is not simply a question of judging whether something is democratic versus nondemocratic. Democracy is a matter of more or less, rather than yes or no. Therefore, even though democratic assessments make usage of criteria for evaluation, the evaluation is presented again on a continuum and in terms of more or less democratic.

Agger and Lofgreen introduced some criteria for democratically evaluating the decision-making policy processes. In their perspective, when making a democratic assessment of processes, one needs to take into consideration: (1) Access – a norm about influence and equality in the channels for influence; (2) Public discussion/deliberation – the opportunity for those affected by the planning process to put items on the political agenda and discuss them openly prior to the decisive stage of a decision-making process; (3) Adaptiveness – a norm about the development of an adaptive political system; (4) Accountability – a norm about developing political accounts (information and sanctions) and (5) Political identities and capabilities – 4 types of capabilities relevant: governance rights, political resources, political competences and organizing capacities. Still, analyzing the type of criteria mentioned above,
one can observe that they refer mostly to the democratic assessment of the input and process of public participation in decision-making.

Moreover, in recent literature (Motsi, 2009), attention has also been focused on the contextual factors that can enhance the democratic effectiveness of a particular citizen engagement initiative, and its outcomes, whether in terms of policy, the decision-makers, or the participants. A few academics have also looked at the people involved in the engagement initiative and the extent to which they are representative of the participation. Consequently, a new framework for democratic assessment is using the following factors: (1) Purpose/Issue, (2) People/Actors, (3) Context, (4) Process and (5) Outcomes.

Taking into consideration, the recent evaluation frameworks for democratic assessment of public participation in decision-making processes, the present research will focus on the thorough description of the following dimensions: the issues, the actors, the context, the process, and finally the results and outcomes. The next table will briefly present the placement of these various types of citizens’ public participation on the continuum contentious – collaborative, according to the above identified dimensions. In the analysis, we will reveal the interplay of different components entailed by public participation (actors, strategies, interactions) in contextually defined forms of participation. Therefore, the various forms of public participation that this study encompasses are not analyzed in terms of yes or no but, as mentioned before, in the context of a continuum where they envisage more or less democratic principles.

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<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Contentious -----------------------------------------------</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Issue/Purpose</td>
<td>Contestation ---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>Opposing actors -------------------------------------------</td>
<td>Networks of partner actors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context / Process</td>
<td>Conflicting ---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>Partnership</td>
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<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Beneficial for some -------------------------------------</td>
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Based on these five dimensions, a number of general questions have been generated, in order to increase the understanding and provide a framework for assessing the democratic consequences of the various public participation processes in a comparative perspective. The following section will briefly present the questions addressed relative to each of the above dimensions.

1. The issue. A central aim of this criterion is to identify the type of issues each of these public participation initiatives focus on. In this section, we first focus on questions like: What is the issue? What type of issues are citizens/groups trying to solve? (Level: local/community/national; how complex the issue is; how costly the solutions are etc.) Furthermore, the research focuses on questions like: What public policy problem are authorities trying to solve? How present is the issue on the public agenda / how much of a priority that issue is?

2. The actors. A central question often raised in assessments of local democracy processes is the question of ‘who’ participates: institutions, citizens or NGOs, or all of them? What kind of NGOs are involved (area of activity, local NGO/local branch of national NGO)? Moreover, other important aspects refer to the relation between these actors and the people they represent. Consequently, the study takes into consideration questions like: Who do they
represent? Where do they draw legitimacy from? How inclusive are they? How can people join? Under what circumstances were the citizens’ groups formed?

3. The context. In this section we are interested in finding out whether the institutional settings favor the citizens’ involvement in the decision-making process. For this reason, we first study the access of actors by the formal channels for participation in the decision-making process through the following questions: What are legally framed entry points and channels for public participation (the level in the decision making process where participation can occur - legislation)? Who holds the power? What is the level in the public decision where participation intervenes (participation can occur at several levels: decision, monitoring, implementation)? Secondly, we study the relationship among actors involved (current and past common history). In this sense, our analysis will focus on questions like: What is the wider political/social context – is the public aware of the problem? Is the public in favor of the solution promoted? Is the campaign/initiation of public policy a response to a general social/political situation (general austerity measures, generalized discontent with public services provided etc.)? Are there any political actors favored and/or in favor by/of the solution proposed?

4. The process. Understanding the complexity of the decision-making process is one crucial aspects of our current research. This section will first focus on the input side of the process, namely on stating and framing the issues. In this sense, the following questions guide the research: Who initiates the action?: Who initiates the framing?: How was the issue framed?: What were the mechanisms used for planning and framing the issue?: Did they involve networking between actors? Is there competition in influencing the public decision or in the framing efforts (among the different NGOs, the different authorities, citizens’ groups)? The other important part in this section is related to the methods and strategies used in order to approach and address the decision-makers. For this, the analysis focuses further on questions like: What were the tactics/methods used in approaching the decision-makers? How important is it to have solutions/proposals backed up by professional research? How do the interactions between actors look like, in terms of: power-relations (who sets the meetings’ agenda), frequency of meetings, the meeting settings (place, time), type of discussions, accessibility of information/discourse for a wide range of audience, type of feedback from authorities during the meetings. What do NGOs/citizens’ groups do when their input is refused, singularly or systematically? How do they adapt their strategies? What do public authorities do when the stakeholders refuse their proposals?

5. Results and outcomes. The last section of the current research focuses on the outcomes of the various types of public participation in the decision-making process. This section focuses on three aspects. Firstly, the analysis will assess the immediate concrete results of these initiatives, using the following question: What were the immediate results (decision, legal act)? Moreover, the other important aspect the analysis focuses on is the impact on citizens as well as on the entire community. For this, the analysis is using the following questions: What was the impact on the citizens/groups/community as beneficiaries of a measure or decision? Who benefits ultimately from such a decision? Did the action result in increased awareness and empowerment among citizens? The last part of the analysis on this section refers to the impact on the decision-makers/authorities. It is important to find out whether these various types of public participation initiatives had any long-term impact on the overall relation between citizens and decision-makers. For this, the study focused on questions like: What was the impact at the level of authorities in terms of: responsiveness and openness to dialogue, improved institutional setting? What was the impact at the community level (type of interactions among community members)?
Using the evaluation framework described above, the research is also designed in several stages and uses various sources of information and data. The first research stage, also known as the documentation phase, is based on the content analysis of websites, blogs, initiated letters and other relevant documents, alongside the analysis of local/national media coverage. The second phase of this research focuses on content analysis of qualitative interviews with the relevant stake-holders and actors involved in the evaluated case-studies of public participation. In this phase a total number of 10 qualitative interviews were conducted, using interview guides based on the described evaluation framework.

References

Country Chapters
Romania
Introduction

This chapter’s aim is to provide a short overview of the current situation of public participation in Romania. It will be complemented by 3 case studies on different forms of public participation currently existing in Romania.

The introductory section will present briefly the legal framework currently in place in Romania regarding public participation and the results of a national survey on public participation.

The case studies presented show different forms of citizens’ involvement in the public decision at local level in Romania. The case studies take into account different approaches in order to assess which of the forms of public participation contribute to the democratic potential meaning which of them has a bigger impact in solving issues and also which of these channels is promoting more transparency at institutions level and more empowering for citizens. They involve different actors – NGOs, citizens or public authorities – and approach different issues (ethnic minorities’ rights, green space rehabilitation etc.) in different manners (from collaborative to contentious).

The first case study talks about the mobilization of a group of NGOs on behalf of a Roma community being evicted from their shacks in order to make room for new development in the city of Cluj-Napoca.

The second case study is about the way the City Hall of Timișoara chose to engage with the citizens by setting up Local Citizens’ Councils in the different districts of the city.

The third case study is about a group of citizens formed in a neighbourhood of Bucharest with the help of a non-governmental organization and which is now militating for the solution of neighbourhood problems, such as revamping of a park.

Public Participation Regulatory Framework in Romania

Ever since the violent revolution of December 1989, resulting in the fall of totalitarian communism, Romania has struggled with its democratic transition. After years of repression, Romanians are still in the process of understanding how to make use of their new or regained rights.

Currently, among different forms of participation, involvement of citizens in the decision making process remains highly problematic as it depends to a great extent on the responsiveness of the state administration and its willingness to listen to the people they represent or nominally work for. Exacerbating the negative effects of the lack of responsiveness of the authorities for citizen participation is the distrust of citizens, their reluctance to get involved and even their lack of awareness of their rights. More or less successfully, NGOs are addressing both the political establishment, pushing for more transparency and accountability on their part, and the citizens, encouraging their participation in decision-making processes. In the contemporary Romanian context, an important milestone was the enactment of legislation requiring transparency on the part of public institutions and giving the citizens the possibility to get involved in the decision making process.
Romania is today among those countries that have a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and a special law dedicated to public consultation, known as the sunshine law. While FOIA covers almost all the institutions managing public funds, the sunshine law refers to “… authorities of the central and local public administration, elected or appointed, and also to other public institutions that use public financial resources”. Technically, almost any authority, from City Hall, county or local councils, to government ministries and the Supreme Magistrate’s Council, falls under the provisions of the sunshine law. However, important exceptions are the national government and the Parliament.

Existing legislation considers some of the standards of citizen participation established by international recommendations, such as the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation of the Council of Europe or the OECD Policy Brief – Engaging Citizens in Policy Making: Information, Consultation and Public Participation.

Hence, legislation acknowledged that information is an essential prerequisite for citizen participation and theoretically FOIA and some other legal provisions guarantee access to the information citizens need to be able to inform themselves about decision making processes and their contents. For example, draft decisions must be made public by institutions several days prior to their adoption. Information on budgets and the structure of institutions, etc, is public and one can request almost any information related to or resulting from the activity of public institutions.

Consultation and active participation, the second and third prerequisites for public participation in policy-making, are also regulated by law. Institutions have to provide a minimum of ten days to receive suggestions from the public on decisions to be taken, and are required to organize public debates on the draft decision at the request of any legally registered association. Further, citizens have the right to attend the meetings of the public authorities. Other provisions mentioning the obligation to consult the citizens relate to local budgets, or to decisions concerning the business environment. Special legislation, following the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, also stipulates citizens’ right to be consulted and informed in the process of taking decisions that affect the environment. The law provides detailed procedures for consulting the public, deadlines and means of information.

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5 Law 52/2003 regarding Transparency of Decision-making in Public Administration.


7 Law 52/2003 regarding Transparency of Decision-making in Public Administration.


At the regulatory level, therefore, public participation is both allowed and encouraged in Romania. Laws have established the principles underlying and the terms under which such consultation takes place. In practice however, and despite quite appropriate legislation, the number of consultations held and their level of effectiveness are rather poor, and by extension, so is the condition of participatory democracy in Romania.

It is clear that legislation is a necessary condition for citizen participation, but the above also points to the fact that it is not a sufficient condition for ensuring quality consultation processes. The lack of political will on the part of the authorities to communicate proactively and in a genuine manner with the public, has generally led to formal consultations, organized too late in the decision-making process, in which 'gate keepers' always monopolize the central role and in which citizens inevitably have little real impact. Authorities treat legislation in this field as a formality. While authorities generally comply with FOIA (as a result of numerous projects implemented by NGOs), the sunshine law has no clear sanctions for non-compliance and is only randomly respected. The general rule is that when an authority has a stake in hiding information or in keeping a decision from public scrutiny, that institution finds ways not to make it available to the public.

This situation is also corroborated by empirical research. The 2010 Democracy Index positions Romania 56th in its ranking of democracies worldwide. Romania is termed a ‘flawed democracy,’ with respect for basic civil liberties guaranteed but with “… significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation”.

The attitude of the authorities described is only exacerbated by the broad lack of concern of citizens for the decisions being taken and by their general reluctance to get involved in decision-making processes. Experts and practitioners in the field explain this phenomenon in different ways: the effects of long years of dictatorship, which encouraged a culture of obedience and resulted in a general silence in relation to authorities and their actions and a lack of critical thinking and the requisite communication skills for active participation. Further, citizens do not necessarily feel responsible for the decisions being taken with a tendency towards a 'let the others do that' attitude. As part of the general distrust of the citizenry towards democracy, its institutions and the power-holders within it, the citizens do not trust that participation has the power to bring about change. Thus, the number of people considering democracy as preferable to any other system decreased to 43 percent over the last 5 years.

Most public participation initiatives, regardless of their form, come from NGOs. In fields like service provision, human rights, civic education, environment and good governance, however, civil society action did not develop naturally, but rather as a result of the encouragement and financial support of external actors. This external impulse ruptured Romanian civil society's ties with its natural constituencies, as it favored forms of engagement not indigenous to them. Sidney Tarrow and Tsveita Petrova explain that Romania, among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, displays stronger transactional and relational activism – generated by NGOs – than activism generated by individuals and constituencies of citizens. Transactional activism is defined as “… ties – enduring and temporary – among organized non-state actors and

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between them and political parties, power-holders, and other institutions”. The same research argues that civil society in Central and Eastern Europe is more developed in terms of building relations with and influencing state institutions than in broadening space for citizen activism. This characteristic of transactional activism may be comforting, but it is important to acknowledge that the scarcity of individual activism can lessen civil society’s impact and create mistrust between citizens and the NGOs claiming to represent them.

Some NGOs are more proactive in trying to be a channel for citizen participation and in advocating for public administration to become more open to them. These efforts take many different forms, and the case studies below provide some examples of the kinds of initiative that do exist.

**National Poll on Public Participation**

The Resource Centre for public participation (CeRe) contracted a national poll on activism in 2012 in order to capture some attitudes and values present in the society that would be conducive to activism or are perceived as “markers” of the existing activism. The number of sample subjects was 1100 subjects, 18 years old and above, un-institutionalized. The sample data is probabilistic; multi-layered; stratification was made in accordance with residency (urban and rural), historical regions, size of urban locality and type of rural locality. There was random selection of localities, electoral constituencies within localities, households within localities and subjects within households. The probabilistic error is at +/-3.0% with a level of certainty of 95%. Interviewing for the poll was face-to-face, at the premises of the subjects, using a questionnaire elaborated by the Regional and Urban Sociology Centre (CURS) in collaboration with CeRe.

The national survey on activism conducted by CeRe between August – September 2012 allowed us to measure the people’s perception on a variety of things: their self-perceived capacity to influence decision-makers (be it local or national), their interest in politics, their view on the ideal society or the people’s understanding of a good citizen, the levels of trust in democracy and Romanian public institutions. The survey also contained a set of questions related to the mass protests that took place in January 2012.

We can see that citizens in Romania do not exercise their rights in relation to public authorities. However, we have always wondered about the “whys” behind the lack of civic involvement or tried to see what differentiates the few existent “activists” from the others.

Some conclusions are obvious right from the reading of the data: levels of trust are low; people are not satisfied with democracy in Romania or are pessimistic about the future and their power to influence the decision-makers and a certain degree of conformism is also present.

**Levels of trust**

Social trust (in other people, in institutions, in the future etc.) is an important indicator of civic culture (Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993), cultural theories of democracy say, as it is

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believed to influence our willingness to get involved in public affairs. It is commonly assumed now that in societies with low levels of trust citizens will not display civic behaviour. Both interpersonal trust and institutional trust are viewed by cultural theories as important ingredients for citizens’ involvement in political life (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2002).

In Romania, according to the survey, the levels of social trust of the population are very low.

Concerning the future of the next generation, the opinions are rather pessimistic – 42% believing the standard of living of the next generation will be worse and 19% saying it will be much worse, while only 17% stating it will be the same.

Politicians and political parties register the lowest levels of trust, followed by the Parliament. Only 5% of the respondents have much trust in politicians and political parties (0% have very much trust), while 9% have much and very much trust in the Parliament. Almost 3 quarters of the respondents trust the church – 29% very much and 43% much.

The low levels of trust in democratic institutions and organizations are probably rooted in the dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in Romania: 88% of the respondents are not at all satisfied or unsatisfied while 10% are rather satisfied with the way Romanian democracy works.

85% of the subjects believe that justice favour some, while only 11% believe that justice is the same for all.

Such a low level of trust in institutions and in the functioning of the state is thus one of the explanations of the low level of activism. Not trusting the system favours passivity rather than pushing the citizens to challenge the status quo.

61% of the respondents consider that the next generation will have much worse or worse living conditions, and only 18% consider the next generation will enjoy a better or much better living.

People’s perception on their power to influence decision-makers

Public participation theories claim that people get involved when they believe they have a chance to succeed (as we are all rational individuals and we calculate efforts in comparison/report to the results we can achieve). This means that the higher the belief in the power/possibility to obtain something (in our case, change in the governance or government spheres), the higher the probability for people to engage.

According to our survey, in Romania, people do not believe they can influence decision-makers. On a scale from 1 to 10, the respondents noted with 4,5 (average) the possibility they have to express their opinion in front of local public administration and with 2,6 the possibility to express their opinion in front of their elected member of the parliament. Regarding the importance people think the elected representatives place on their opinion, this is valued, on the same scale with 3,2 for local representatives and 1,7 for members of the parliament.

The perception on citizens’ power to influence the decision makers confirms thus the general distrust in democracy.
The perception on the different methods used to influence public decisions

The respondents seem to favour more “passive” ways of engaging publicly. Only 11-20% of the respondents consider it is important to initiate actions oriented to influencing the decision-making process and only 22% consider it is important to protest against an “unjust fact in the community”, compared to 41% who consider it is very important to vote in the elections (they gave a 10 for rating the importance from 0 to 10 where 0 is not important at all and 10 is very important).

Regarding the efficiency of the different methods to be used in order to influence decision-makers, 38% consider voting is very efficient, with a total of 83% in the superior half of the scale (from 1 to 10). Quite far away from voting is activism within a political party (12% consider this is efficient in the effort to change decision-making), attracting mass media attention (10%), take part in public rallies (7%). To contact politicians personally is considered to be the least efficient initiative (only 5% of the respondents think this is efficient). This is in close relation to people’s belief their opinion value very little to politicians (local or national elected representatives). The quite high preference for voting (among different forms of participation) is an indicator for a conformist culture of the Romanians.

The actions people undertook in the last 12 months in order to change things for the better, most of the respondents said they donated money (44%) or contacted a civil servant (22%). Only 12% of the respondents said they used the internet or social networks in order to achieve the change they acted for. This quite low percentage somehow contradicts the belief that the social media has a tremendous role for activism.

Regarding the instruments at hand people have in Romania in order to exercise their citizens’ rights, the percentage of people aware of the existence of the Freedom of Information Act is increasing. A relatively high percentage (25%) said they know of the existence of the Act, and 11% of those who are aware of its existence even used it to ask for public information in the last 12 months.

Interest for politics

Numerous studies showed that people who have an activist behaviour have an interest in politics and are informed about what’s going on in the political arena. It seems that in Romania the interest for politics is quite low: only 17% discuss often politics, while 47% do it rarely or never. Those discussing politics most rarely are young people (9% of them discuss often, 68% rarely or never). The immediate conclusion might be that potential for activism is to be found in the 17% that show a higher interest for politics (there is need to find possible correlation within the data).

Values: the good citizen and the ideal society

Paying taxes and respecting the laws are the most valued behaviours by the respondents of the survey: 51% and 50% respectively consider these are very important. Solidarity or volunteering are important for only 25% and 10% respectively.

Thus, the agreement or disagreement with the possible definitions of a good citizen is grouped by 2 factors: “activism” (organizing campaigns/support actions for a cause, protesting against an unjust fact in the community, being active in volunteering organisations) and “conformism” (paying taxes, always respect laws and regulations, voting in the elections).
The preference for “conformism” is consistent with the idea of voting as the most preferred form of activism. It is also a confirmation of a certain degree of obedience. The preferences for a certain “ideal society” are also grouped by the previous factors. The majority of the respondents would very much like to live in a society “where each person is rewarded in proportion with his/her merits” (72%), “where you can rely on justice to fix injustice done to people” (68%), “a society that offers the means for personal accomplishment” (67%). Less preferred are society in which “the highlight is on people’s political involvement” (15%) or which “offer people total freedom” (14%).
Case Study No. 1

Citizens’ Consultative Committees - CCCs (Consiliile Consultative de Cartier) in Timișoara

An overview

The present case study focuses on the initiative of Timișoara’s municipality to introduce District Consultative Councils. This initiative was inspired by the French model of Conseil de quartier (neighborhood council) in Mulhouse, a twinned city with Timișoara. The aim of this initiative was to improve the communication between citizens and the local authorities and to improve the level of information as well as the involvement of citizens in the policy-making process in local politics.

These conseils de quartier (or “neighborhood councils”) are infra-municipal participatory forums that exist in many parts of France. Since 2002, cities with more than 80,000 residents have been mandated by law (Loi #2002-276 relative à la démocratie de proximité) to establish neighborhood councils. Many cities and towns with fewer than 80,000 residents also have their own neighborhood councils. Local elected councils are fully responsible for the form, remit, and membership that neighborhood councils take. Neighborhood councils have no formal decision-making powers but rather exist as consultative bodies that elected politicians - in principle - turn to in order to engage with and ascertain the views of local populations on specific questions. In some towns and cities, elected councils provide their neighborhood councils with a small discretionary budget of their own (referred to as “enveloppe budgétaire”). The Citizens’ Consultative Committees in Timișoara embraced the organizational structure as well as legal framework from the French model. Still, a series of differences and adaptations to the Romanian context can be identified.

In the case of Mulhouse town, every neighborhood council has an annual budget allocated that can be spent according to the district needs and the priorities stabilized by its citizens. In Timișoara, the legislation does not permit this approach. Consequently, in the case of consultative committees in Timișoara they can receive public money, through public competition of projects, or from private entities through the Cultural House, since they do not have a legal status. Another extremely important difference is related to the politicians’ involvement of these committees. In the French neighborhood councils, the presidents of these councils are also vice mayors of the Mulhouse town. In the Romanian context, due to high levels of mistrust in politicians and political institutions, the Mayor at that time, Gheorghe Ciuhandru, and his team decided to leave the entire organizational process in the hands of the citizens. The public officials considered a problem engaging politicians in these citizens’ groups.

Currently there are 20 district councils in Timișoara. Since their inception, some of them managed to be extremely active and to initiate – in partnership with other entities - several projects, cultural events and other needed initiatives for the communities they represent. In the next table there will be a brief introduction in the CCCs’ activities. The source of information
used is the City Hall’s website, where the CCCs have a special space, dedicated to their activities.\(^\text{13}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr. crt.</th>
<th>Name of the CCC</th>
<th>Centre/periiphery</th>
<th>Date of establishment</th>
<th>Meetings with both representatives of local authorities and citizens/ from the City Hall’ website dedicated to the CCCs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Calea Sagului – Elisabetin-Odobescu</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>31(^\text{st}) of March 2004 and the new board was elected on 10(^\text{th}) of June 2010</td>
<td>No information available on City Hall’s website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Calea Aradului</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>12(^\text{th}) of October 2006</td>
<td>No information available on City Hall’s website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cartier Tipografilor</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>19(^\text{th}) of February 2009</td>
<td>Since its establishment the CCC organized 5 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. During these meetings, the CCC presented the situation of the centralized district issues and also collected further encountered problems. The most recent meeting that was mentioned on City Hall’s website was on 07.04.2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Steaua Fratelia</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>21(^\text{st}) of April 2004, a new board was elected on the 12(^\text{th}) of June 2007 and later on the 15(^\text{th}) of April 2010</td>
<td>Since its establishment the CCC organized 23 meetings with the local authorities and citizens. The topics of these meetings ranged from the presentation of the board, the centralization of issues identified by the citizens, identification of solutions to the addressed issues, the elaboration of letters or other written intimations, proposals to be included in the local budget expenditures or the organization of the district’s cultural days. In the last year, the CCC was very active in maintaining the financing of a district school, where most of the students (around 80%) are Roma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Zona Soarelui</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>17(^\text{th}) of April 2008</td>
<td>Since its establishment, the CCC organized 7 meetings with the local authorities and citizens. The discussions focused mainly on the identification of issues from the community as well as the official presentation of the leading board in front of the citizens.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Calea Sever Bocu and Calea Lipovei</td>
<td>Near Center</td>
<td>21\textsuperscript{st} of July 2004, a new board was elected on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of November 2008 and later on the 12\textsuperscript{th} of April 2011</td>
<td>On the City Hall’ website 2 meetings could be identified, with both local authorities and citizens. In both meetings the agendas focused on officially presenting the leading board to the citizens in the district. The CCC was mostly active between 2007 and 2008, monitoring the traffic in its area as well as proposing strategies and initiatives for infrastructure investments in this area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ronat</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>18\textsuperscript{th} of October 2004, new boards elected first on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of October 2007 and later on the 9\textsuperscript{th} of December 2010</td>
<td>Since its establishment the CCC organized 11 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. The discussions focused on identifying and centralizing the issues identified by the citizens and presenting them to the local authorities responsible for implementing solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Plopi - Kunz</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>25\textsuperscript{th} of February 2005, new boards were elected on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of March 2008 and on the 17\textsuperscript{th} of March 2011</td>
<td>Since its establishment, the CCC organized 7 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. The focus of these meetings was again identifying the issues and presenting the official leading board to the citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mehala</td>
<td>Near centre</td>
<td>18\textsuperscript{th} of September 2004, a new board elected on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of September 2007</td>
<td>Since its establishment, the CCC organized 17 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. Still, most of the meetings related to either the presentation of the leading board or the organization of the annual district event and other similar cultural events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Calea Martirilor</td>
<td>Near center</td>
<td>31\textsuperscript{st} of March 2005 and the new board was elected on the 16\textsuperscript{th} of February 2010</td>
<td>Since its establishment, the CCC organized 13 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. The meetings focused mainly on discussing the possible solutions for the identified issues in the community as well the organization of cultural events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Iosefin - Dambivita</td>
<td>Between centre and periphery</td>
<td>17\textsuperscript{th} of March 2004 a new board elected on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of December 2007</td>
<td>Since its establishment, the CCC organized 21 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. Since the CCC organized cultural events since 2005 most of its meetings focused on the organization of these events. In addition, the focus was also on the issues the community identified and</td>
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needed solutions for, such as: parking lots, rehabilitation of streets but also environmental issues. In one of the meetings, the CCC also launched a newspaper called “Foia Iosefinului”, mainly for informing the citizens in its community.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Ghiroda</strong></td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>11(^{th}) of February 2004, new board was elected on the 23(^{rd}) of October 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Since its establishment the CCC organized 9 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. Most of the meetings were about their proposals to address the issue of town mains that needed rehabilitation in their area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 13 | **Freidorf** | Periphery | 28\(^{th}\) of January 2004 and the new board was elected on the 15\(^{th}\) of 2008 |
|   |   |   | Since its establishment the CCC organized 4 meetings with the local authorities and citizens. The meetings focused on the issue of introducing a centralized system of town mains as well as the citizens’ participation in organized summer cleaning days. |

| 14 | **Fabric** | Near center | 16\(^{th}\) of October 2008 |
|   |   |   | Even though this CCC is among the last ones established, it proved to be very active. Since its establishment, it organized 18 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. It also proved to be one of the most present CCC in the local media. They initiated projects that later were replicated by other CCCs. The CCC also launched their own website and newspaper called “Ziarul de Fabric”. |

| 15 | **Circumvalutiiunii** | Center | 3\(^{rd}\) of March 2004, new boards elected on the 22\(^{nd}\) of March 2007 and later on the 21\(^{st}\) of January 2010 |
|   |   |   | Since its establishment the CCC organized 10 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. The discussions focused on issues such as: the streets’ rehabilitation as well as the environment. |

| 16 | **Ciarda Rosie** | Periphery | 15\(^{th}\) of January 2004, a new board elected on the 11\(^{th}\) of December 2008 |
|   |   |   | No information on the City Hall’s website. Still, the CCC launched their own newspaper, called “Jurnal de cartier”. |

<p>| 17 | <strong>Cetate</strong> | Centre | 13(^{th}) of October 2004 |
|   |   |   | Since its establishment the CCC organized 15 meetings with both local authorities and citizens. Most of the meetings focused on organizing cultural and other similar district events. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>CCC Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date of Establishment</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Campus Universitar</td>
<td>Near center</td>
<td>24th of April 2008</td>
<td>This CCC is among the most recent ones and is concentrated in the area of the University campus. Since its establishment, it organized 6 meetings with the local authorities and citizens, mostly about the specific issues identified in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Blascovici</td>
<td>Near center</td>
<td>18th of February 2004, new board was elected on the 9th of October 2007</td>
<td>Since its establishment the CCC organized 12 meetings with the local authorities and citizens, mostly about the specific issues identified in the area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing the above table, one could argue that there are a lot of differences among the CCCs: some of them are older (since 2004), others are fairly new (since 2008), some are less active and others are extremely visible, engaged and active. In addition, the CCCs are organized at district level and since the districts differ a lot in terms of economic and social indicators, as well as in terms of types of issues, the study will also take into consideration these aspects, when choosing the CCCs to be further analyzed. Therefore, the current case-study research will focus on two of the most active CCCs in Timișoara but also on two CCCs that are coming from districts with different social, economic and geographic characteristics: one from a historic, centralized and with mostly middle to upper-middle class citizens – the CCC Fabric, and the other one coming from a peripheral, poor district – the CCC Steaua-Fratelia. The aim is to understand the mechanisms that made these CCCs so active and engaged in the local policy-making processes. In order to understand them, the study follows five important sections: issue, actors, context, process and outcome.

The study is based on information collected from two different sources of data. In its first phase, the study focuses on documentation based on the CCCs activities from reports and other related documents, media coverage, official websites, legal documents and other relevant documents. On the other hand, the second source of information is based on a set of interviews carried with: the Vice Mayor of Timișoara – Adrian Orza, the President of CCC Steaua Fratelia – Inge Kron, the President of the CCC Fabric – Constantin Ilena-Savulov, the Counselor from the Public Relations’ Office in the City Hall – Adrian Schiffbeck and the President of FALT (Federation of Tenants’ Association in Timișoara).

I. THE ISSUE

The general objective of the CCCs is that of improving communication between local authorities and citizens. Still, some more concrete operational objectives can be identified: the informing of citizens concerning the projects in their neighborhoods, social cohesion through implication in several projects as well as a way to become familiar with the issues and gather the concrete problems from every district.

Since the CCCs are groups of citizens organized at the district/neighborhood level, the issues they are trying to solve are locally embedded and do not imply other types of publics than the ones represented by them. Consequently, most of the issues refer to: the rehabilitation
of streets and historical buildings, the cleaning and rehabilitation of parks, playgrounds or parking lots. In addition, some CCCs also brought into attention broader issues like civic education for the youth, social cohesion through cultural manifestations and even security and access to education for disadvantaged groups.

Moreover, considering the fact that the CCCs are organized at district level, the issues identified differ due to their geographic position of the district (central or peripheral), their ethnic composition, time of establishment (historical or new districts) or proximity to industrial areas. CCCs that are situated in central or historical areas focus on issues like rehabilitation of historic buildings, parks, ecologic parking lots and youth civic education. In comparison, the CCCs that represent more peripheral and industrial districts focus on issues like rehabilitation of streets and district public schools, access to education for disadvantaged groups, access to water and town mains as well as security.

For instance, in the case of the CCC Steaua-Fratelia, situated at the periphery of Timișoara in an industrial area, the most stringent issues identified were mainly street rehabilitation and green spaces. Mrs. Inge Kron, mentioned in an interview that the highest priority for her CCC was indeed the rehabilitation of streets: “From the very beginning, when I decided to join the CCC...since I live in the city outskirts, in a district, where many of the streets, including mine couldn’t even be reached by the garbage car. It was terrible. [...] After 4 years the issue with my street was finally solved.” (Inge Kron – President of CCC Steaua-Fratelia). Even though the issue of streets is stringent in this district it is still a major and extremely costly issue that needs to be addressed. Coming from a peripheral district, the issue was not always considered a priority for the authorities. Still, with the help of mass-media and the CCC pressures it soon became a priority and was present on the public agenda.

In addition, a recent issue that was brought into the attention of authorities in Mrs. Kron’s district was related to the Nr. 15 School from No. 1 Aleea Chișodei, that risked closure due to lack of finances and students, in March 2013. Closing the school was affecting mostly the Roma community, since almost 90% of the students are Roma. The CCC Steaua-Fratelia, represented by Mrs. Kron, brought this issue on the public agenda and managed to postpone the decision: “The School was supposed to be closed, since 90% of the students are Roma children, and the rest are going at other schools in the district. They realized that it cannot be closed, since the Roma students would either give up school or would simply not be able to cope with the students in other schools.” (Inge Kron – President of CCC Steaua-Fratelia).

By comparison, the issues identified in the historical and central CCC Fabric were different in both complexity and costs. Being situated in an area near the center meant that the CCC Fabric has very few streets in need of rehabilitation. Consequently, most of the issues identified in this CCC were related to green spaces, parks, youth civic education and citizen’s security. In this sense, one of the issues identified focused on the security of citizens.

Concerning this issue, there were several contexts in which it was identified. Firstly, there were sporadic situations where groups of delinquents started committing felonies in an old residential area, with old people being most of the owners. The delinquents repeated the felonies and although in the beginning the issue was not of great interest, it soon became a high priority: “I had a case that repeated 3 times, when I realized it became a real problem. There were some gypsies that were offering their services for rehabilitating the water drains. They went only to the houses that are easy to be scammed. They were saying they were sent by the mayor and that it costs 400 RON but in the end, it ended up costing 4000 RON. Four of them work and 10 others wait outside the house in a van, in case of the need to physically intervene”. (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric). Moreover, the CCC Fabric
also focused on the security of green spaces and parks since several citizens complained about acts of violence and devastations during the nights.

The other type of security issue identified by this CCC was related to food security in the open-air food markets: there was one particular food market that faced serious problems – Badea Cartan. “We had a project, Badea Cartan - the most recent market from Timişoara – that after 10 years was in very poor condition” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).

One of the most interesting issues identified within the context of CCC Fabric was that of the lack of civic education and political engagement among the youth. Since most of the members from CCC Fabric have young children, some of their concerns were related to their children and especially the young people’s lack of civic and political engagement.

It can be easily identified that the issues brought into attention by these two very different CCCs were also very different in terms of types of needs and funds to be allocated. Therefore, in the case of Steaua-Fratelia (a poor area at the periphery) the issues were very complex (streets’ rehabilitation, schools for disadvantages children) and consequently needed greater funds to be allocated, while in the second case – that of Fabric (a historical area situated near the center) the issues were more particular, on a shorter run and some of them without the need of financial support from the local authorities. Still, besides these differences, we could still conclude that the issues the CCCs are trying to solve are of local character, without necessarily being present on the general public agenda, but rather at district or even street level discussions.

II. THE ACTORS

The Citizens’ Consultative Committees

The Citizens’ Consultative Committees were introduced in 2003, following a decision of the Timișoara City Council after a request initiated by the Mayor Gheorghe Ciuhandru. The CCCs function based on a City Council decision HCL 195/16.09.2003 that mentions their aim as well as their role in the decision-making process. The constitutive decision was soon followed by another HCL 240/11.11.2003 that stipulated the framework regulation for the functioning of CCCs. This regulation was later modified with the HCL 29/22.02.2005 and with the HCL 265/31.07.2007, when a group of citizens and members of already established CCCs required some changes and improvements. The changes were not significant and focused mainly on: including the definition of citizens’ consultative committee, re-designing the geographic areas assigned to the CCCs in order for every district to have a CCC or some aspects related to mechanisms of internal decision-making.

As a result, the number of CCCs increased from 11 in the beginning to 19 (and later 20), representing all the districts from Timişoara (The most recent CCCs were established in 2008). Citizens’ Consultative Committees represent the citizens from every district in Timişoara. Moreover, the CCCs represent the citizens that either live or work in a specific district (HCL 95/2001). Even though in the beginning not all districts had their own CCC, they were assigned to other neighboring district CCCs that were already established. Citizens’ Consultative Committees represent the citizens from every district in Timişoara. Moreover, the CCCs represent the citizens that either live or work in a specific district. (HCL 95/2001)
Even though in the beginning not all districts had their own CCC, they were assigned to other neighboring district CCCs that were already established.

As mentioned in the beginning, the Citizens’ Consultative Committees were introduced by the mayor of Timișoara, using the French model from the twin city Mulhouse. The idea of this initiative started from a very practical need: the mayor and his team started to regularly organize meetings in the districts and realized they needed an institutionalized framework in order to identify the districts’ needs. “It all started in 1996, when Ciuhandru was in his first term, he used to go in all the neighborhoods and we realized that during these meetings we didn’t see the same people. [...] Basically we realized that at every meeting different people came, with different requests. I wanted to meet the same people, since my principle is for these people to grasp and filter the neighborhood needs. I don’t want to meet today with 10 and next week to meet with 10 others coming with other problems <<We don’t want a parking lot but a playground>>” (Adrian Orza, The Vice-mayor of Timișoara).

Indeed, in order to tackle this problem they used the French model of citizen participation in local politics. According to the Vice-Mayor of Timișoara the French model of neighborhood councils were adapted to the Romanian context. One important difference refers to the fact that in the case of the French neighborhood councils, these are led by the vice-mayors, while in the case of the CCCs from Timișoara the leading board is elected from the citizens themselves.

In the HCL 95/2001 it is stipulated that the CCCs are constituted in every district in the city in order to create a social partnership between the local authorities and citizens in solving public local problems. Even though the general aim of these consultative committees is to respond to the needs of the entire area they represent, the members of these CCCs start their activity with a personal issue to be solved. For instance, Inge Kron (President of CCC Steaua-Fratelia) wanted to join the CCC in order to solve her issue: the rehabilitation of her street: “I heard about them in the mass-media. Even from the beginning I wanted to join since I live in the periphery of the city, in a district where most of the streets, including on my street, the garbage cars couldn’t get in”.

The same personal issues drove Constantin Ilena-Savulov to join the Fabric CCC. He mentioned that it all started when large trucks started to transit his street. It was not a very important issue for Savulov at that time. Still, after a small accident, he was forced to stay in the house for 6 weeks. During this time, he realized the gravity of this issue since every time a truck was transiting on the street, the house was moving. He admitted he didn’t know anything about the CCCs at that time, but he noticed a small advertisement in a local newspaper about a CCC meeting in another district: “It happened that I had an accident and that I had to stay at home for 6 weeks, I had a surgery and staying at home I felt all the discomfort created by the trucks transiting on my street. [...] Having some time, I started reading the local newspapers and I saw on the bottom of a page an advertisement about the meeting of the CCC in the Ghiroda Dorobanti district.” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric). As mentioned before, and after hearing the motivations that drove citizens to join the CCCs, it is clear that they were influenced by mostly personal issues. Still, even though in time their issues were solved, they continued their work representing the communities they live in.

An interesting characteristic of these CCCs is related to their legal status. In their constitutive act there are also stipulations about their judicial character. The CCCs are “instruments of citizen participation for the improvement of the decision-making process in local public administration” (HCL 195/16.09.2003). Consequently, the CCCs are citizens’
associations (groups) without legal personality and having as the main goal the participation in decision-making at the local level. Not having a legal personality is a very important issue especially in the context of legitimacy. Still, being a structure created by the City Hall it draws its legitimacy from this direct relation. „The City Hall wants us, we have their assistance; for every project or initiative they look for possible partners” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).

Still, this dependency relation is not approved by all members of the CCCs. Mrs. Inge Kron – the president of CCC Steaua-Fratelia - mentioned for instance that it is very difficult for them to initiate any project without being dependent on the City Hall. The issue of legal personality was raised from the first years the CCCs were established. In time, there were several initiatives from the members of CCCs to tackle this issue but it has not yet been sorted. “We had several meetings with members of other CCCs, to see if we can do something about this situation, to obtain legal personality. Well, some districts want this, while others don’t. We cannot do anything only for one, we need more districts. Still, even with this legal personality, you need money.” (Inge Kron – President of CCC Steaua-Fratelia).

To sum up, members of the CCCs recognize the need for a legal personality in order to have greater legitimacy in negotiations or initiatives, but they also acknowledge the fact that they might encounter additional problems, especially related to finances. Being a structure alongside City Hall gives the CCCs legitimacy to ask for any type of help, including funds in solving their districts’ issues.

**Membership requirements and inclusiveness**

In order to be established, every Citizen’s Consultative Committee needs to have at least 7 members. In addition, they need to elect a leading board: 1 president, 1 vice-president and 1 secretary. The Regulation also mentions the possibility of organizing thematic working groups depending on the issues in their districts and alongside the City Hall departments. The CCCs have the freedom to decide on the number of its members. Still, the regulation mentions the CCCs should be formed of a minimum of 7 members and a maximum of 50 members, in order to be sufficiently functional. The activity of the members is voluntary-based. In the first regulation framework (2003) it was stipulated that every citizen over 18 and resident in a district can become a member of a CCC. The regulation was later changed (2005) in order to be more inclusive and now every citizen that is over 18, resident or working in a district can become a member of its assigned CCC.

An important regulation is related to the quality of the CCCs members: every citizen can become a member of the CCC in his/her district; the only restrictions are to be over 18 and to be apolitical. In addition, local counselors or clerks at the City Hall are not allowed to be members of the CCCs. Consequently, the regulation creates a rather inclusive framework for citizen participation. The procedures and criteria for joining the CCCs are stipulated in the final dispositions in the framework regulation (HCL 29/22/02.2005). Every citizen can apply for membership in a CCC (respecting the above mentioned criteria) and the process is rather simple. The applications, together with the CVs are analyzed and approved with the simple majority of the CCC. Still, some CCCs decided to avoid the City Hall interface and accept the application directly at their center or at the public meetings. “[...] if there is no public meeting organized, but since we are well organized, the application can be hand in directly to us, since people come first at the meetings and only after that fill in the application form.[...]” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).
Still, both the authorities (through the Vice-Mayor and the director of the Public Relations Office) and the CCCs mentioned the low participation of citizens. Even though most of the CCCs claim having around 25 members, only around 5 of them are active and actively participate in all the meetings. In this sense, the Vice-Mayor acknowledged the fact that these CCCs are rather closed groups and that some of the leaders might be even reluctant to share their power with other citizens: “The problem is, from my point of view, that they (members of CCCs) are very much closed; they don’t try to promote the idea and attract other people from their district […] but I might be mistaken.” (Adrian Orza, the Vice-mayor of Timișoara).

The above-mentioned problem was raised and acknowledged by some CCCs and they started developing strategies and projects to involve more citizens in their activities. In the case of CCC Steaua-Fratelia, they initiated a proposal to the City Hall to reward the seniors that get involved in the CCC’s activities with some tickets for the public New Year’s Eve party or to organize short trips for them.

In comparison, in the CCC Fabric, the strategy is rather the opposite, in the sense that they are developing strategies and projects to attract young people. The project, initiated in 2010 called “THE YOUNGSTERS DECIDE!” wants to encourage young people to become civically engaged. The project is coordinated by the CCC Fabric, the W. Shakespeare High School and the City Hall. The initiative was again influenced by a foreign exchange, this time with a twin city from Italy and the aim was to train the young students on local administration, CCCs, about participatory democracy. Besides developing young students’ civil and political efficiency, one of the secondary objectives of this project is to bring the young people closer to the CCC’s activities. “The project went quite well in the last two years. We organized a lot of visits at the City Hall and other institutions, meetings with public officials from the City Hall, teambuilding meetings and summer schools where they were stimulated to identify and analyze important issues and problems in their communities. They all came with different initiatives and had a sort of competition in which we chose a winner whose project was later put under City Council voting and financing.” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).

The success of the pilot project made the City Hall decide to extend the project in other CCCs. Consequently, this year “Five High Schools from Timișoara together with representatives in the CCCs from their districts constituted some working groups of 10-15 students with whom the school education counselors work for the elaboration of small projects in their districts; at the end of the year we will include them in a competition and the winner’s project will be implemented” (Adrian Schiffbeck – counselor at the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall).

Other actors

a. Local Authorities

The regulation encompasses the framework for internal organization, membership but focuses also on the relation of these CCCs with the other actors. In this sense, the first actors with which the CCCs work directly are the City Hall and the Local Council. Within the City Hall, there are several departments that are responsible with the relation with the CCCs. The most important department is that of Public Relations – through its counselor Mr. Adrian Schiffbeck. “When I first started in 2003, I was responsible for the relation with the civil society […] after 2004, when the CCCs started to be established I was also responsible for
the relation with these CCCs. Only then I saw the entire process as a whole, like the communication with citizens’ representatives” (Adrian Schiffbeck, counselor at the Public Relations office in the City Hall).

From their establishment until the present, more than 100 joint meetings were organized with the citizens, the members of CCCs, the mayor Gheorghe Ciuhandru, the vice mayors, representatives of different departments within the City Hall: Urbanism, Development, Communication, Environment, but also the Centre of Social Assistance, Community Police, or Proximity Police. Another office from within the City Hall that has direct connection with the CCCs is the Center for Citizens’ Counseling. Its main attributions are to administer the relations with the general public, to register all the complaints, petitions, requests and well as to inform the citizens about all the public information required. All the CCCs mention in their contact details the contact details of this Center for Citizens’ Counseling – room 12 in the City Hall’s main building.

b. NGOs

Since the beginning, when the CCCs were only in the project phase, several NGOs, like the Euro-regional Center for Democracy, the Pro-Democracy Association and the West Foundation for Journalism encouraged their establishment, development and further activities. First, the partnership with these organizations was based mostly on the organization of public awareness campaigns as well as trainings and seminars for the members of the CCCs on citizen participation in the decision-making process. In the next paragraphs there will be a brief introduction of the goals and objectives these organizations have.

The Euro-regional Centre for Democracy (CED) is a nongovernmental organization that promotes democracy and stability in East-Central Europe. Among its main objectives, the most important ones refer to:

- Construction and consolidation of democracy in the region;
- Encouragement of partnerships between institutions and nongovernmental organizations, at local, regional or national level;
- Development of NGOs institutional capacity to assure the professionalization of human resources within the nongovernmental sector;
- Focus on citizens’ engagement in the decision-making processes.

The Pro-Democracy Association (APD) is a non-governmental, nonprofit and non-party affiliated organization established in 1990. APD currently has 31 clubs in which more than 1000 citizens (members and volunteers) participate in implementing their projects. The mission of APD is to strengthen democracy at national and international level by encouraging civic participation. The main fields of interest of APD are strengthening the relation between the electorate and its representatives, observing the correctness of the electoral process, civic education, citizens’ participation in the process of public policies drafting, the transparency of public institutions and their control by the civil society, protecting human rights.

The West Foundation for Regional and Euro-regional Journalism (WFJ)’s mission is to contribute to the reform of the Romanian society in three essential fields: to assists journalists and young creators interested in local, regional and euro-regional cooperation by providing them with administrative, financial and technical support and by facilitating network activities in the area; to sustain collecting, processing and free dissemination of information in order to
open all communication channels between civil society and decision makers at different levels of local, regional and euro-regional authorities; to stimulate the local, intra and inter-regional co-operation and development.

The main goal of the Foundation’s activities is the accomplishment of an open and pluralistic society, based on a stable and functioning democracy, with institutions which are dedicated and which serve the citizens' concrete needs. In order to fulfill these objectives, since 1999, WFJ developed projects and activities with the goal to stimulate the young journalists’ involvement in local, regional and Euro-regional development, economic and cultural contacts and co-operation between different communities in the region offering them the possibility to participate in the implementation of such projects. An important component of WFJ’s programs refers to partnership with Local Government Units aiming at improving interaction between citizens and local public institutions.

In their recent activities, the CCCs and local authorities developed important partnerships and networks with these organizations to sustain their activities. Detailed analysis about these partnerships will be developed in the next section.

c. Mass-media

In the beginning of the CCCs’ activity in 2006, a local TV station together with a local newspaper launched a campaign in order to inform citizens about every district’ specific issues. In addition, the City Hall also made short movies with various activities organized by the CCCs that were later distributed to the citizens. In this phase, the mass-media played a very important role for making ordinary citizens aware of the importance and role of CCCs in their districts.

Nowadays, public meetings organized by the City Hall or the City Council, with the participation of the CCCs, are announced through all the mass-media channels. In this sense, the Public Relations’ office in the City Hall sends press-releases about the meeting to all the mass-media institutions they collaborate with. In addition, The West Foundation for Journalism and other local media were involved in the process of CCCs’ activities visible to the general public.

III. THE CONTEXT

The institutional setting

a. General legislation and channels for public participation in decision-making

Citizen participation in the decision-making at local level is based on the following legislative acts:

- Law 544/2001 – concerning the free access to public information (later modified and by Law 371/2006; Law 380/2006; Law 188/2007) stipulates the right of all citizens or other interested actors to any information or documents that are related to the activity of public institutions and authorities;

- Law 52/2003 – concerning the transparency of decision-making in public administration, regulates the possibility of intervening in the decision-making process and the obligations of authorities to facilitate the public’s participation in the decision-making. (It was
added to with Law 242/2010 that introduced two important aspects: the possibility of citizens to intervene in the process initiating public policy proposals and the obligation of authorities to give a written justification for the recommendations that were not taken into consideration);


Based on the above-mentioned legislation the local authorities are obliged to engage the citizens in the process of normative acts’ initiation and decision-making. In the process of initiation and elaboration of a normative act, the authorities must inform the citizens about the act, 30 days before starting the adoption phase. In the adopting phase, the authorities are obliged by law to inform the citizens about the public meeting when the City Council votes for that specific Normative Act 3, days before the meeting. In this phase, the citizens have the right to make recommendations, but cannot vote. The Law 242/2010 brought a very important change in terms of citizens’ recommendations: the authorities are now obliged to make a written justification regarding the citizens’ recommendations that were not taken into account. Indeed the above-mentioned laws brought a lot of improvements in terms of public participation in the decision-making processes. Still, the channels created are not very clearly stipulated and leave a lot of freedom for maneuver to local authorities.

b. CCC legislation and channels for public participation in decision-making

The CCCs’ regulation framework (29/22.02.2005) briefly describes the channels through which the CCCs can interfere in the policy-making processes. Consequently, the CCCs have the right to make proposals, suggestions and intimations that are handed in to the working groups in the City Hall, depending on the issue. These proposals are supposed to be taken into consideration in taking a decision. The CCCs have no right to directly interfere in the adopting phase of the City Council, since their role is only consultative. In addition, the City Hall and Council are obliged to inform the CCCs concerning any decision that affects the citizens they represent. Consequently, the most important channel for interfering in the policy-making process for the CCCs is through the communication and relation with the City Hall working groups.

The other very important channel, in terms of public participation in decision-making, created by the CCCs legislation refers to the right of interfering in establishing the strategy for next year’s public spending: “Every year, the CCCs will propose to the Local Council the investments and operations they want to implement. These proposals will be financially analyzed by the municipal services. The presidents of the CCCs will prioritize the proposals taking into account the capacity of financing and will make final proposals to the City Council” (CCCs Procedure for Cooperation).

In terms of the powers the CCCs share with the local authorities, the following aspects can be identified: consultation in the normative acts’ initiation and adoption phases, as well as budgeting. Since the consultation power is also stipulated in Law 52/2003, a special focus will
be put on the budgeting powers. Every year, in the last months, when the next year’s public budget is discussed, the CCCs are also involved in developing the budgeting and financing strategies. All the CCCs are asked to participate in a common meeting, in which they are asked to briefly present the identified priorities for their districts. In this meeting, there are also representatives from the City Hall’s working groups that transparently negotiate with the representatives of the CCCs on the identified priorities.

This is a transparent process where all the districts’ representatives are aware about the way public money is spent across the city. Only after the negotiation process is finished, the proposal for next year’s budget will be exposed to debates and adoption in the City Hall: “The most important thing, I assume, and the one that gives legitimacy to this initiative of participatory democracy, is that we, before debating the local budget, negotiate with them. [...] We don’t meet only with 3 NGOs and fake the consultation process [...] in October when we need to talk about next year’s budget we meet with them. They come with their priorities that we accept or not, explain why not, in front of everyone, so that everyone knows that in this district we give this money [...] and only after we all agree, we go to the City Council” (Adrian Orza, the Vice-mayor of Timișoara).

In the French model of neighborhood councils, every council has a certain budget every year that can be spent by them, without the interference of public authorities. In the Romanian case, the Public Finances Law has very strict stipulations on how to spend the public money. Essentially, there are no legal channels to allow structures like the CCCs to have the power of spending public money. This constraint is also a result of the lack of judicial personality. Consequently, the CCCs have no real power in using a budget for solving their issues. The power of spending is intermediated through the local authorities.

c. The relationship among the actors involved (current and past common history)

Since his first mandate, in 1996, the mayor of Timișoara, Gheorghe Ciuhandru, introduced the regular authorities’ visits in all districts of Timișoara. Together with his team and other representatives of local authorities, he wanted to grasp the issues of Timișoara through these types of visits. Consequently, as the Vice Mayor Adrian Orza (that was in Ciuhandru’s team all along) mentioned, there was always a relationship between citizens and the City Hall. The recent legislation (especially the Law 52/2003) only brought the legal framework for these types of interactions. In addition, when the CCCs were first introduced (2003) the representatives of local authorities already had a history in terms of communicating with citizens in all the districts of Timișoara: “They (the public officials and officers) were already going at the district meetings with the mayor and the representatives of the City Hall working groups, so it wasn’t something new for them. The process was already there but it wasn’t professionalized.” (Adrian Orza, the Vice-mayor of Timișoara).

Even though the type of relation introduced by the CCCs was already established, there were a lot of issues that emerged in time. The most important issue that attempted to destroy the aim and role of CCCs was that of politicization. The fear of political interests’ intrusion in the process of communication between CCCs and the City Hall was present since their establishment in 2003. This fear was present from both sides, the City Hall and the citizens or other NGOs.

A first consequence was that one of the few restrictions for becoming a member of the CCCs introduced by the regulation framework was to be apolitical. Still, the representatives of the City Hall recognize that in the beginning there were a lot of attempts from politicians to become members of the CCCs. In time, the political parties realized the CCCs are not the
right place for doing politics and withdrew. Still, in the present constituency of the CCCs, there are suspicions concerning political interventions and interests: “We have the case of Maria Grapini (member of a political party), member of a CCC even though the regulation clearly stipulates that all members should be apolitical” (Adrian Orza – Vice Mayor). The suspicions of the CCCs being politicized also come from an important local nongovernmental organization called FALT (Federation of Tenants’ Associations from Timișoara). FALT is a non-profit organization that represents the interests of its members (tenants’ associations and citizens) in relation with the local authorities and other public institutions.

In an interview, Petru Olariu (the authorized person from the FALT Managing Committee) mentioned several times the fact that these CCCs are created and manipulated by the City Hall and the Mayor: “And this is something they invented in order to claim they consulted with the civil society. [...] It is really absurd to say that the issue of the bridge in Calea Sagului area was solved by the CCCs, when for so many years politicians like Tariceanu and other deputies all struggled to make this bridge.” Indeed, Petru Olariu is extremely dismissive of the activities “claimed” by the CCCs. In his opinion, all the activities are done by the City Hall or Council and they only declare these as being results of CCCs’ activities. Moreover, he also identified and named several presidents or members of the CCCs that are engaged in different political parties: “In the beginning most of the members of the neighborhood councils were members of PNT, and after a while they acknowledged it is outrageous and moved to PSD. [...] For instance this one is from PSD, now is a candidate for the County’s Council. [...] This one is involved from the very beginning, now he is from PNL” (Petru Olariu, FALT). Even though the legal framework of CCCs clearly stipulates that all the members of CCCs must be apolitical, there are suspicions about some members also being politically involved in different parties. One visible case is that of Mrs. Grapini, as mentioned in a previous section, but the presidents of the CCCs are trying to control this phenomenon.

Another suspicion of politicization, mentioned by FALT comes from the fact that most of the CCCs’ activities are run through the local public authorities. This happens since the CCCs have no legal status and cannot finance themselves. Therefore the CCCs’ activities are easily mistaken with the local authorities’ activities. Consequently, due to these suspicions, the relation between FALT, City Hall and CCCs is rather conflictual and not constructive. This subject will be treated in depth in a future section.

d. The political/social context and public awareness

The political situation in Timișoara is different than the one in many other cities: the Mayor, except during his first mandate, is not from a party in government. Moreover, his political party is not represented in the Parliament, hence also not in the national political debates. The 2008 elections (the current mandate) created a very fertile framework for the CCCs. The Mayor’s party signed an alliance with 2 other political parties, called Alliance for Timis. The aim of this political alliance was to create a majority in the City Councils around Timis County. Having the City Council’s majority on the City Hall’s side made all the decisions easier to adopt. This also increased the opportunities for the CCCs to have their proposals and initiatives approved and adopted easier and more rapidly.

Nevertheless, recent political developments and the future local elections bring the risk of changes. In 2010, the Alliance for Timis underwent severe crises since one of the parties within the alliance - PNL (National Liberal Party) started criticizing the Mayor’s party and claiming that they constantly violated the 2008 Protocol.
In terms of the social or civic situation in Timişoara, Petru Olariu (FALT) acknowledged that Timişoara is not a civically active city anymore, that there is a great level of apathy among its citizens but also among the local civic organizations. One explanation for this situation is related to the issue of NGO financing. Since Romania is part of the European Union and is considered a developed and democratized country, a lot of international founders started to withdraw their funds for Romanian organizations. In addition, this situation is coupled with the financial and monetary crisis. Therefore, most of the nongovernmental organizations are dependent on the money coming from the City Hall and consequently, the civil society is not very active in criticizing or monitoring its activities: “At this time in Timişoara, the civil society went through a lot. Now for example, the public debates are very few, this year there was only one so far and we asked for it.” (Petru Olariu, FALT). In this context, where the political situation is not stable and where the social and civic sectors are not very active, the role the CCCs in decision-making are becoming even more important.

Most of the problems/issues these CCCs try to solve are, as mentioned in the above sections, rather particular and extremely localized. Consequently, in many cases the general public is not even aware or concerned about them. Both CCC presidents interviewed recognized that citizens are very selfish and that they are becoming interested in a particular issue only when they are directly affected by it. They, themselves, mentioned that they started to hear about the CCCs’ existence and activities only when they faced with a problem that affected them directly.

Still, due to the CCC’s regulation, all the CCCs should inform their citizens about the identified issues and possible solutions. In this attempt to educate and inform the citizens, the CCCs were helped by media. In this sense, there was a defined period of time, when one radio station and one newspaper presented the issues in all districts of Timişoara. Moreover, some CCCs even launched their own blogs or websites, where they can post both their activities but can also start a communication with the citizens they represent. In this respect for instance, two of the CCCs have their own blogs to communicate with the citizens and maintain a two way information relationship: CCC Circumvalutuni and CCC Blascovici. In addition, CCC Fabric launched its own website. Another way of informing the citizens about the CCCs activities is through informative display panels that are located in all the districts from Timişoara. There are a total of 26 display panels around Timişoara.

Furthermore, the City Hall’s newspaper “Monitorul” also allows publishing space for the CCCs to share the issues and solutions with the citizens. At the same time, the City Hall together with local NGOs organized several campaigns in order to make citizens more aware about their collective problems and possible solutions. In addition to the City Hall’s newspaper, the activities of CCCs are also presented in the local media – on-line or printed. In the on-line press (Timişoara Online) 67 articles related to the activity of the CCCs could be identified. In the next table there is brief presentation of the articles identified in 2006-2012 (until March).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of articles</th>
<th>Name of journals</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Timişoara, Evenimentul Zilei, Agenda Zilei</td>
<td>- organized cultural or another events, the role of CCC in public administration, proposals for reorganization of the CCCs;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Timişoara, Opinia Timisoarei, Agenda Zilei</td>
<td>- civic education project initiated by CCC Ronat, the role of CCCs, the introduction of CCC newspapers, organization of public consultations concerning urban planning, the proposals and plans of CCC Steaua Fratelia;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ziua de Vest, Timisoara, Agenda, Agenda Zilei</td>
<td>- the role of CCCs, meeting between the Community Police and the representatives of CCCs, Christmas events organized by CCCs, the consultations with the CCCs and public authorities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Timisoara, Renasterea Banateana, Agenda</td>
<td>- information about the meetings with the CCCs, consultations in area Soarelui for urban planning, the general presentation of CCCs’ activities, cultural events organized by CCC Fabric, the project “Youngsters decide” initiated by CCC Fabric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing the print media, one could identify that in time the CCCs became an interesting subject for the press and therefore, the citizens could be better informed about their activities and projects.

IV. THE PROCESS

Based on Law 52/2003, the local authorities are obliged to inform the citizens, hence the CCCs about all the normative acts and decisions. Since by Law and Regulation, the CCCs have only consultative power, they are informed about all the normative acts under debate or already adopted through the Office of Public Relations, or through the City Hall magazine Monitorul (That is freely distributed online and in hard copies). Indeed, the regulation framework (HCL 29/22.02.2005) stipulates that CCCs have the right to initiate any proposal, suggestion or action to the City Hall. In addition every year, towards the end the CCCs have the right to propose to the City Council the investment strategy for next year, with their priorities: “They (members of CCCs) come to me to discuss the problems from their districts.” (Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall). The only aspects – related to the process for naming and framing issues - mentioned in both regulation and constitutive acts refer to the fact that the CCCs are obliged by law to reunite at least three times in a year in the designated meeting spaces. The
CCCs’ meetings are called by their presidents at least 15 days in advance. In addition, the CCCs are obliged to organize at least one of the meetings open to the large public “in order to inform the citizens about the composition of the CCC as well as to report the state of their proposals or projects.” (HCL 29/22.02.2005).

Even though the Vice-Mayor recognized that the general aim of these CCCs is to grasp and identify the district’s issue, there are no stipulations concerning the processes through which each CCC identifies issues and proposes solutions. In this context there are a lot of differences among the CCCs and their strategies for identifying or grasping the issues in their districts. As mentioned above, the regulation, stipulates that the City Hall together with the CCCs and other local authorities are obliged to organize at least once a year a common public meeting in every district. In the organized common public meetings, citizens have the opportunity to raise a problem they identified in their districts. “We organized public district meetings, until now three times a year. For these meetings, the City Hall announces the mass-media; through the website and the City Hall magazine [...] everybody comes here with their problems.” (Inge Kron, President of CCC Steaua-Fratelia).

The same situation is present in the other analyzed CCC. The President of the CCC Fabric mentions the possibility for citizens to bring up their issues through the public meetings organized together with the City Hall. Still, the members of CCC Fabric have a slightly different approach: they organize thematic public meeting: “We started with 4 meetings a year, since periodically was our possibility. We decided to use the strategy of choosing a topic for the public meeting, so that the representatives from the City Hall and other authorities can come according to the discussed topics.” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).

Indeed, in time the CCCs and City Hall realized that the thematic public meetings are more efficient since citizens are able to interact directly with the specialists and responsible public officials on that particular issue and now most of the meetings are organized following this strategy. “The CCCs ask for a public meeting [...] they report, for instance, a problem concerning citizen’s security and consequently they invite the chief of local police, representatives from the national police and representatives from the City Hall. If they claim problems with the town mains, the chief of those services is also invited.” (Adrian Orza, Vice-Mayor).

Even though the CCCs together with the City Hall representatives realized the effectiveness of these thematic common public meetings, there are no specifications or procedures for the CCCs to decide on the need for a meeting on a particular issue. Consequently, there are no stipulations on how the CCCs should grasp and identify the district’s issues. Each of the CCCs has the freedom to develop their own procedures and strategies in collecting and prioritizing the district’s issues.

Some of the CCCs, as the case of Steaua-Fratelia, rely mostly on the public meetings organized together with the City Hall and other authorities. Additionally, they maintain direct contacts with citizens towards the possibility of identifying issues directly from citizens: “on the City Hall website, every CCC has a page, with contact details and activities. So people can contact us at any time.” (Inge Kron, President of CCC Steaua-Fratelia).

In the case of CCC Fabric, the strategy for identifying issues is more complex and through different mechanisms and procedures developed in time. In the first years since its establishment (2008-2011), the CCC Fabric didn’t have an official space, where members could be reached and approached by citizens. Consequently, the president of this CCC, Mr.
Constantin Ilena-Savulov, mentioned that their strategy was not much dependent on citizens to signal problems in their district.

As a result, the first mechanism for identifying issues in their district was through the vice-presidents and secretary of the CCC. They split the district in smaller areas, so that every vice-president or secretary could be responsible for an area. After doing this, they were responsible to go every week in that area and identify the possible issues: “When I started, I woke up with 5 vice-presidents and 1 secretary. I said to them, we need to split the district in 6 areas. We made a map with different color for each area. I asked them to take a notebook and to take notes on the problems.” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).

Even though, this strategy brought an improvement in terms of identifying issues, it wasn’t too efficient. They ended up collecting tens of issues but couldn’t cope with their prioritization. As a consequence, in recent years, they adopted a different strategy: that of working groups. The CCC Fabric used the stipulation in the regulation and re-organized the members alongside working groups. Currently, there are 5 working groups: environment, roads and traffic security, socio-cultural, relation with schools, urbanism and general town issues (public street lighting, town mains, water… etc). The role of these working groups is not only to identify the issues but also to prioritize among them. If they receive several similar requests, they have to analyze, compare the situations and later prioritize.

In addition, they introduced additional procedures and mechanisms for receiving information on citizens’ concerns. Some of these mechanisms are common with the other CCCs. For instance, some CCCs came with the initiative of creating their own district publication, CCC Fabric was one of these CCCs and with the financial and logistical help of the City Hall they managed to launch the Fabric Magazine (until now 2 editions were released). The aim of this magazine was both to inform citizens about CCC Fabric activities, but also to create a communication mechanism among the CCC members and citizens. The other method used was the website, which both created a space for sharing activities and actions but also concerns and issues.

Furthermore, the CCC Fabric introduced a rather innovative method for grasping citizens’ concerns. They asked for mailboxes, which were assembled in different highly circulated spots in the district. This initiative gave citizens an extra opportunity to express their own concerns and issues. Lastly, a rather recent procedure was introduced: through direct meetings at the CCC Fabric office: “Not once did I come across people at my door […] after 3 years I came with the idea of creating an office, so that we can become more visible.” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).

Taking into consideration the fact that the issues each CCC are trying to solve are so complex and sometimes costly, they don’t exclude the possibility of creating networks with other actors but this depends on the types of issues they want to address: “We had some projects together with the Senior Council, we cooperated at cultural events, we had 5 projects involving several schools, one with the Euroregional Center for Democracy […] and another project dealing with the pollution from the Continental Company” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, CCC Fabric).

As mentioned in the previous sections, most of the CCCs organize cultural or social events in their districts every year. For these events, since they do not have their own budget, most of the activities are financed by local companies that have the headquarters in those areas. Due to the lack of legal status, the City Hall created a network between the CCCs, the companies and the Cultural Houses, through which the financing of these events is possible.
Another interesting example of networking between different actors is the case of a project initiated by the Eurotraining Foundation Center for Business and Craft. The idea of this project was to assist the disadvantaged people and the members of the CCCs in their professional training and was implemented in 2010-2011. The actors involved in these projects were of a wide range, encompassing: City Hall, CCCs’ members, companies, NGOs and disadvantaged citizens.

In addition, the CCC Fabric, for instance, developed a very close relation with the William Shakespeare High School during the time. In the beginning, all the CCC meetings were held in the High School building but without any formal partnership. This network was established due to a project initiated by the CCC Fabric, called “The Youngsters decide!” and has as its main aim the raising of civic and political participation among the young generations. The project started in CCC Fabric with a partnership with the Shakespeare High School and this year was replicated in other 5 CCCs and 5 High Schools.

The CCCs’ aims and activities are concrete and specific to each of the districts they represent. Still, their main aim is to represent the interests of every citizen living or working in their districts in relation with the local authorities and other public institutions. All things considered, the assumption would be for FALT and the CCCs to cooperate in order to fulfill their common goal. Still, neither FALT nor the CCCs are eager to cooperate. Both presidents of the CCCs recognized the difficulties in cooperating with FALT: “I know Mr. Olariu, I turned to him sometimes for his help. It is a bit difficult, the relation with FALT” (Inge Kron, President CCC Steaua Fratelia). “We tried to cooperate but we didn’t manage” (Constantin Ilene-Savulov, President CCC Fabric). A similar reaction was identified from the FALT side, too: “From the moment the CCCs appeared, we tried to help them and the Senior Council. [...] When we needed their signatures for a petition against the City Hall they said they cannot sign since the City Hall assists them in their activities. At that time I told them that from then on they should go to the City Hall for help” (Petru Olariu, FALT).

Moreover, when several CCCs asked from FALT the database with the presidents of Tenants’ Associations in order to either publicize their activities within the district, or to attract new members, FALT did not provide them with the needed information: “At one point I asked them the names and contact details of all the presidents of Tenants’ Associations or blocks of flats. They didn’t provide them.” (Inge Kron, President CCC Steaua Fratelia).

Even though, in the situations mentioned above, the CCCs encountered difficulties in interacting and cooperating with professionals, like the ones from FALT, the presidents of CCC Fabric and Steaua-Fratelia acknowledged the importance of involving professionals in their proposals: “Recently I became very interested in attracting professionals and well-documented people so that in the end I am able to take decisions for the citizens, decisions backed by professionals.” (Constantin Ilene-Savulov, President CCC Fabric). The president of CCC Steaua-Fratelia, Inge Kron also mentioned the importance of professionals especially in a project that her CCC initiated – that of redesigning a public park: “We had very good collaboration with the Association of Landscapers that created very good projects”.

Moreover, even though the members and the leading board are elected from ordinary citizens, the CCCs are still a part of the City Hall’s structure. Considering this, one might argue that the relation between the CCCs and the local authorities is based only on agreements and cooperation. Still, the relation is not of subordination and there are several situations in which these entities are in conflict or disagreement: “If you could see a district’s meeting and if you have the patience to attend these meetings, you could see that the discussions are rather tough.” (Adrian Orza, Vice-Mayor).
There are a lot of ways and strategies to approach the decision-makers, but in the case of the CCCs, the most utilized methods are first of all the ones provided by the framework regulation: the direct relation with the Public Relations’ office, the district meetings organized with both citizens and representatives from the authorities and meetings with the representatives of public administration institutions and contracting companies: “The following components can be mentioned: visits at the City Hall, conversations on the phone, e-mails, district meetings to discuss different subjects (depending on the most stringent issues), periodic sessions with entities subordinated to the Local Council or private companies contracted by the administration - whether we talk about sanitation, public transport, water or town pipes.” (Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall).

The leaders and members of the CCCs have a permanent contact with the civil servants from the Public Relations’ Office (from now on the PR office) in the City Hall. Since 2006, Mr. Adrian Schiffbeckk is responsible with the relationship between the City Hall and other local authorities with the citizens and the CCCs. Usually, the proposals, suggestions and complaints written by the CCCs or citizens are transmitted by the PR office to all the departments in the City Hall that are responsible for that specific field. The directors of these departments answer these requests through the PR office towards the CCCs. For instance, in the case of CCC Fabric, from its establishment in 2008 they addressed 17 letters to the Mayor, the City Hall departments or other related institutions. Out of these 17 letters, the CCC Fabric received answers for 12 of them.

A very important aspect is the fact that these meetings are organized at the request of the CCCs. The CCCs firstly identify the issues that need to be tackled and later initiate district meetings with the authorities responsible for solving the issues. In each district, depending on the issues identified there are at least 3-4 meetings a year. During these meetings, the civil servants, representatives of public services and the local counselors make presentations of different projects; they give details and explanations to the citizens on important issues from their district and receive proposals or suggestions from both citizens and members of CCCs. In addition, as mentioned in previous sections, meetings also are organized at the end of the year for including the CCCs proposals for next year’s budget expenditures. These budgetary meetings are initiated by the City Hall and the agenda is set again by the City Hall representatives.

In the case of these more conflictual situations, or situations where the CCCs react towards specific decisions or normative acts, the strategies used by them are letters and petitions: “Most of the times we approach the authorities through letters sent to different departments in the City Hall and other institutions and we receive answers. In the case of a refusal, we have the doors open to all departments for further discussions. We can talk with the directors of these departments. If we still don’t manage to solve our issues, we go to the Mayor or Vice Mayor to finally solve them.” (Inge Kron, President CCC Steaua-Fratelia). In addition to these strategies, the decision-makers can be approached by other, less formal and more dynamic means, as Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall mentioned: “We also have telephone conversations among clerks and representatives of the CCCs, and a lot of electronic correspondence”.

An extremely important strategy that was successfully used by both CCC Fabric and Steaua-Fratelia was based on establishing personal connections and relations with the clerks responsible for different departments within the City Hall: “In the beginning I tried to gain their respect, since I was coming from the side of ordinary citizens and I felt the barrier
among us a little bit. The citizen was not happy with the way changes happened, while the clerk was fed up with the citizen’s negative attitude. I tried to get to know people, since there are people and people, with different personalities, so first of all I wanted to know with whom I am collaborating. I had to learn step by step where to go, I didn’t use the letters approach and I wanted to discuss face to face. In the case where I couldn’t build personal connections, I approached them using the hierarchical structure.” (Constatin Ilena – Savulov, President CCC Fabric).

Indeed, this strategy was considered by both CCCs and local authorities as the most successful one. Still, the representatives of the CCCs acknowledged the difficulties in establishing these ties also because people are very different and with different personalities. Establishing these informal ties is encouraged by the local authorities since this way more issues could be solved with the implication of fewer people: “From the very beginning I was the only contact person for them, so with any type of issue they had, they approached me and I was in charge of transmitting it further. In time they created personal relationships with representatives from different departments in the City Hall or other institutions.” (Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall).

To conclude, the CCCs adapted their strategies of approaching authorities to the types of personalities of the clerks they to interact with. Consequently, in departments with more open directors, the strategies adopted are rather informal, while in departments with problems, the strategies are more official and mostly through letters.

V. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The current section will focus on identifying the results and outcomes of CCCs’ activities through time. In order to do this, the section will be split into three parts. The first part will briefly present some of immediate results of their initiatives and projects. The next 2 parts will focus on the impact on both the community and the authorities.

An important aspect that needs to be addressed in terms of the relation between the CCCs and the City Hall is related to the monitoring and centralization of all the activities and projects that these CCCs have throughout their time. In this respect, the City Hall representatives, together with the CCCs developed mechanisms through which they can monitor the implementation of several projects: “…we also have meetings in which we monitor what was implemented and what not, as well as reasons for which certain issue have not been accomplished. The process is thus being analyzed.” (Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall).

In addition, in September – October of each year, the CCCs are invited to write a report which is being presented to the City Hall and Council. The reports contain the proposals and actions of each CCC in a specific period of time, but also the proposed objectives and investment wishes in the area for the next year.

The CCCs are entities that function since 2004 and through time, they proved to be active and with an entire realm of immediate results and outcomes. Consequently, this section will bring into the attention only the most recent results, from the 2011 annual reports.
One important trait of these results is that they are very specific to the areas the CCCs are representing, but similar activities can also be identified. Consequently, most of the immediate outcomes in 2011 are: rehabilitation of streets and sidewalks, thermic rehabilitation of blocks of flats, rehabilitation of thermic networks, the improvement of existing bicycles’ tracks, public lighting on streets, access to water and town pipes but also the arrangement of ecologic parking.

In addition, in almost every district there was at least a park rehabilitated or redesigned. From this area, the most important accomplishments are the rehabilitation of Children’s Park and Roses Park. Moreover, other important results refer to the rehabilitation of historic buildings in Timișoara. In 2011, the rehabilitation of historic building continued with the Serbia Curacy and others from the CCC Fabric area. In this respect, the president of CCC Fabric launched a project in partnership with the Euroregional Center for Democracy and the William Shakespeare High School. The High School students had to identify old buildings in their district and to plead for their rehabilitation. The most convincing project won and the rehabilitation of that building was initiated.

Besides these very specific and particular results, other types of results could be identified. In recent years, as was already mentioned in previous sections, the CCCs started to develop networks among different types of actors in order to fulfill their needs. These partnerships include NGOs, foundations, public authorities but also private companies. The fact that the project “Youngsters Decide!” was a success and was very well received by both teachers and students made this project to be replicated this year with new participants.

Other important results refer to the higher degree of visibility of these CCCs. In recent years, the mass-media presented not only press releases about the CCCs’ meetings but also more in depth articles based on their projects and activities. In addition, other very visible results focused on environmental issues: parks’ cleaning, public spaces’ rehabilitation but mostly to the development of ecologic parking lots in most of the districts in Timișoara.

In terms of the impact of CCCs’ activities on the citizens and communities they represent the opinions are contradicting. On one side, some argue that there is no real impact on the community and that citizens continue to be disengaged and non-participative: “At the citizens’ level, the citizen is a little passive. We became selfish and interested only in our self.” (Constantin Ilena-Savulov, President of CCC Fabric).

Continuing the critical approach, others argue that the problem of communication is maintained through time, and that although citizens and members of CCCs are constantly in contact with local authorities, some of them use an inappropriate way of addressing authorities: “It depends, I don’t want to generalize, but I think there is still some work to do on developing a decent type of communication” (Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall).

To conclude, the citizens are rather subjective, and since they are not familiar with these forms of participation, it is only after they obtained something through the help of the CCCs that their attitude change: “Some people have a positive attitude, but some are negative. Those that had their streets paved or green spaces rehabilitated said yes, the CCCs have a positive impact.” (Inge Kron, President CCC Steaua-Fratelia).

Moreover, the other very important impact and outcome is related to a better communication with the public officials and local political representatives. Through the exercise of interacting periodically with the public officials, the ordinary citizens build and
increase their level of trust and overcome the prejudices that politicians are uninterested in a real communication with citizens: “There is a better type of dialogue to be identified, derived from the fact that you start to know the person in the City Hall, to whom you previously looked at in an abstract way; you discuss with him and you realize that he is not really the bad guy presented on TV” (Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall).

In terms of the impact on authorities, things are more optimistic and the most important impact is reflected in the type of communication and relation between citizens and CCCs on one side, and authorities and civil servants on the other side: “Yes, I can say yes for sure. Knowing the people that work in different department, knowing them for a while now, I can say the relationship is different. I don’t want to say that there are some departments with which the cooperation is rather slow, but with the vast majority I work very easily and they are very helpful.” (Inge Kron, President CCC Steaua-Fratelia).

Besides the actual communicating within the local authorities, other similar outcomes can be identified. Consequently, from the perspective of the side of the civil servants and local authorities’ representatives, a very important outcome is the improvement of communication with the citizens they represent: The benefits are that you have a more efficient rapport with citizens; you end up knowing people from every district better. There are meetings everywhere, with politicians, public officials, representatives of local authorities and ordinary citizens, but when you structure these meetings using such a framework, you only have benefits.” (Adrian Schiffbeck, Counselor to the Office of Public Relations in the City Hall).
Case Study No. 2

The Working Group of Civic Organizations CLUJ - GLOC (Grupul de Lucru al Organizatiilor Civice) and the Pata Rât controversy

An overview

This case study is centered on the set of initiatives taken by several organizations from the civic sphere as a response to the relocation of 76 families, most of them of Roma ethnicity, from a central area of the city of Cluj Napoca, near the garbage dump near the city border. Their evacuation and relocation in an environmentally unsafe area which is also largely isolated from facilities and services available in the city was interpreted as an abuse and possibly resulting in ghettoization for a population deprived of the possibility to defend its rights.

The action, undertaken by the municipality in December 2010 generated the critical reaction of a number of organizations that subsequently were reunited under the umbrella of GLOC - Grupul de Lucru al Organizatiilor Civice - The Working Group of Civic Organizations. GLOC is not a formally established organization, yet it brings together a large number of civic organizations from various areas of activity, university professors and other individual members and that reacted to the measure taken by the Cluj City Hall.

Since its creation, in the beginning of 2011, GLOC was involved in numerous actions, some of which were directed toward the local decision makers, others towards national and international organizations. At the same time a significant effort has been put into raising awareness about the existing situation within the Cluj community. Thus, the repertoire of GLOC’s action is diverse, and includes open letters, appeals of solidarity, petitions, public debates, street protests, street events, meetings with representatives of the municipality, site visits etc.

The study is based on information generated through two types of approaches: documentation of group’s activities and events organized by GLOC, review of the exchange of documents with the public institutions, press releases, documents issued by collaborators, video materials created by activists associated with GLOC on the problems of Pata Rât communities. These materials are for their most part hosted by GLOC’s own website17, but also on websites external to GLOC. The second source of information are the interviews carried out with three of the active members of GLOC: University Professor Enikö Vincze, PhD, who is one of the core founders and active members of the group and president of Desire Foundation; lecturer Cristina Rat, PhD, with a background in Sociology; Adrian Dohotaru, involved also in GAS (Grupul pentru Actiune Sociala / the Group for Social Action), and collaborator at Critic Atac journal. The study follows five sections: issue, actors, context, process and outcomes, each of them responding to specific sets of interrogations which construct the narrative of the Pata Rât controversy.

I. THE ISSUE

This section discusses the problem which triggered the civic initiative, from the points of view of its actual content, amplitude, complexity and presence on the public agenda.

As mentioned in the introductory part, GLOC was created as a civic critical reaction within the context of a relocation of 76 families from Coastei Street in Cluj Napoca to the garbage dump of the city. The measure was enforced in December 2010, as a result of a series of steps taken by the municipality starting with the spring of 2010. The nature of the problem and the fact that there are clear and specific publics affected by the initiative make the problem a local one, falling under the prerogatives of the municipality and county-level public authorities. However, despite its local nature, when considered in the wider context of locative programs for Roma population, or even in a broader sense, that of inclusion and integration of vulnerable categories, the issue reveals its complex nature and far-reaching consequences.

From the point of view of the authorities, the issue may be expressed in terms of a locative problem of the Roma families from Coastei Street in Cluj Napoca. The issue entails, at this level too, several aspects: on the one hand there is the legal aspect – and in this regard it was the legality of those families staying there that was contested by the city hall. The families stayed in social houses provided by the municipality for which they paid rent. The rental contracts had not been renewed despite the fact that the rent had been paid for December 2010 – the month when the actual evacuation was enforced. The second aspect used by the authorities as a justification for the relocation is related to the complaints that the city hall received from the inhabitants from Coastei Street’s neighboring areas concerning the noise, the felonies, the dirt, grounds on which the respective citizens demanded the intervention of the authorities. Lastly, a further argument for the relocation concerned the quality of the housing in terms of hygienic conditions and related utilities. From this point of view, the relocation to Pata Rât, in the newly built modular houses has been presented as an improvement to the families’ locative situation.

The letter sent by the municipality to GLOC reads: “…we believe that the local public authority ensured, by its actions, and fully respecting the human rights, the solving of a real social problem and these actions were oriented to and resulted in increasing the quality of life of the communities involved in the project.”18 The arguments of complaints and hygiene issues have been criticized by the civic organizations as insufficient grounds for a mass relocation, since they were problems that called for specific and targeted solutions as remedies for those particular problems.19

From the point of view of GLOC, the problem to be addressed is multilayered, both horizontally and vertically. The vertical dimension alludes to the fact that the problem is approached punctually – as a response to a concrete measure of the authorities; at the same time however, the situation is acknowledged as being part of a wider deficiency related to issues of housing, social and economic integration of Roma population in the city of Cluj.

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18 Letter no. 11196/13.01.2011, sent by the Cluj Napoca City Hall and signed by the mayor Sorin Apostu.
19 The legality argument too was been deemed as questionable, since, according to GLOC’s appeal from January 2011, the City Hall had not renewed the families’ contracts since 2009, but at the same time it did take their rent until December 2010 including, despite this ambiguous and tolerated locative situation.
Horizontally, the problem is complex, because it entails numerous aspects, not only regarding the contestation of the city hall’s decision for relocation, but also the contestation of the procedural aspects of the relocation.

In the Appeal for Solidarity and Action against the Cluj City Hall’s Project “Social Houses in Pata Rât”, the signatories stated the object of their criticism and content of their efforts: “The main objective of our actions was and remains stopping the City Hall’s project of moving the Roma families evicted from other parts of the city in the so-called “social houses” in the Pata Rât area. Everyone must admit that this administrative measure does not solve the socio-economic problems of the Roma families but aggravates them due to their relocation/eviction to an isolated area at the periphery of the city. We repeated many times that: the creation of such residential area near toxic waste means ghettoization [...]”

The problem then is perceived as a defective solution which not only results in segregation but also in the terms of a unilateral decision that excluded the consultation with the affected communities and was enforced in manners that contravened the rights of people of being informed well in advance about the eviction: “instead of notifications regarding the eviction, relocation or the location that they were to be moved to, the families have received on 15 December a notification requiring them to file an application for social housing at the municipality the next day; many of those notified were not “without shelter”, although all of them have been defined as such in the notification and they couldn’t know where and how the social housing should be requested”. Other procedural deficiencies relate to the differential treatment of the families relocated – some of which were moved in Pata Rât in the modular houses built by the city hall, others who have received 20 square meters of land per family and some construction materials to build themselves houses to live in. Additionally, the concerns of GLOC are directed towards the consequences that the relocated families are confronted with, in terms of marginalization, exclusion from the basic facilities they could use while living in Cluj, and isolation from general forms of participation in the social life.

The Pata Rât area consists currently of three inhabited zones: firstly, the newly created area – also known as the New Pata Rât where 250 people have been relocated in December 2010 from Coastei Street. This is the newest community and, as it will later on be underlined, they feel they have a different identity than the old inhabitants from Pata Rât. The second community consists of the people living on Cantonului Street, which gathers 400-450 people, moved there about 10 years ago. The oldest and the most numerous community is the so-called Dallas community, with about 1500 people living near the garbage dump. According to GLOC, “the families from ‘Dallas’ have been assisted for several years by the Pro Roma Foundation and the Foundation for the Support of Families.”

The heterogeneous composition of Pata Rât is an important aspect, because it speaks for the complexity of the issue and the multiple challenges that Roma communities face, in locative and – more broadly – inclusion terms. In this regard, an additional concern for the GLOC founders was directed towards the community from Cantonului Street. They were also in danger of eviction because the National Railways Company asked a presidential ordinance to remove the improvised houses from the area of Cluj Napoca East Station. In June 2011, Amare Phrala and Desire Foundation sent a letter to the city hall in which they called for

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21 Ibid.
23 GLOC Report 10.06.2011.
“solidarity and responsibility of habilitated institutions to support the persons concerned in the trial launched by the National Railway Company Bucharest and its Cluj Branch.”\textsuperscript{24}

It must be underlined that at the level of GLOC there is a clear awareness of the far-reaching nature of the consequences of the measure under discussion, as well as on the multi-dimensionality of the problem and the wider context which circumscribes this problem (later to be developed in terms of problem framing). However, there is also a great component of realism in terms of how much can be done and what levels are realistically feasible to be reached. Related to this, Cristina Rat pointed to the approach that GLOC took in order to address a problem that is definitely intricate and difficult: “I find it more important to stay focused on the local problem, because it is at the local level that all this prejudice and power relations manifest most strongly; at this level they are not diluted into a wooden language in which we speak about Roma people in abstracto, about inclusion in abstracto, but instead we speak of concrete things [...] things in which inclusion is actually measured”.

As far as the salience of the issues is concerned, yet again the discussion has to be carried in two directions. The authorities’ first signals about their intention to relocate the families from Coastei were first made public in March 2010, through a Local Council Decision\textsuperscript{25}. The decision approved the beginning of identification and purchasing of land in the Pata Rât area. The land was to be purchased by the city municipality for the placement of families living illicitly on Coastei Street and Cantonului Street in the city of Cluj Napoca. According to Prof. Vincze, when reactions began to emerge as a response to such signals, the authorities manifested a relatively hesitant attitude in terms of what exactly they wanted to do, how and with whom “the answers were hasty… that they do not know yet for sure… they do not know whether it will be those from Coastei or Cantonului or Dallas. It did matter who was going to be moved [...] For those from Dallas things would have evolved towards something positive, or for those on Cantonului moved there since 2002, family by family …but it’s a completely different thing for those from Coastei... who are much closer to an actual integration in the life of the city…”.

The modular houses that were planned to serve the relocated families have been built starting with the fall of 2010, and the 76 families from Coastei have been moved in December 2010. Only part of them actually received housing. So the fact that the measure was not applied identically for all families moved from Coastei raised additional concerns and question marks on the municipality’s approach. Cristina Rat recollected the way in which the authorities treated the families, with regard to what happened after the evacuation: “What the city hall did maybe has a legal cover because the law says that relocation is possible even during winter, if alternative houses are being provided. This is partially true for those families who did receive a house but does not hold true for the families who only received the verbal agreement of the city hall: here are some construction materials, build a house. And the people asked: “On which legal basis?”…They were answered: “The way you managed on Coastei, you will also manage here…” [...] They do not have ownership over the land... those who did not receive houses built houses, but they continue to live illegality”.

Apart from these aspects, there have been further shortcomings in the municipality’s approach that GLOC observed and criticized. Thus, an additional problem revealed by Cristina Rat has to do with the fact that the city hall had treated all families relocated from


\textsuperscript{25} HCL no. 127 / 30/03/ 2010.
Coastei as if they were a coagulated, homogenous community, which in fact it was not the case. Between certain families there were enduring conflicts and tensions. The authorities, however, did not pursue a case-sensitive approach when they decided that the relocation is needed because there are problems in the area. “They have been treated like a bunch of people who stay there illegally and who are all some sort of semi-criminals, vagabonds and trouble makers. This was disturbing for people, the fact that they were all treated the same way, that they ignored some families’ special needs [...] They completely overlooked the social problems of the people.”

II. THE ACTORS

This section reviews the actors involved in the framing and contestation of the Pata Rât issue and in the implementation of the current solutions and the projected changes in the future. The section describes first and foremost the civic actor involved - a collective entity emerged from the collaboration established between various organizations and non-affiliated individuals and briefly reviews the other institutions and organizations involved. The interactions between GLOC and the remaining actors are better explained in the sections dealing with the actual context and succession of actions that were carried since the advancement of the problem and the subsequent developments.

What and who is GLOC?

Creation and composition of GLOC

As briefly discussed in the introductory part of this study, the creation of GLOC - as an umbrella for several civic organizations - was a response to the municipality’s project of “social housing” on the field from Pata Rât. Pata Rât is an area at the margin of Cluj Napoca, where the city waste dump is located. It is therefore easy to understand that the appropriateness of the location as a residential area is under question. Apart from the environmental challenges posed by the area being the place where the waste is accumulated, the location is also deprived of proper public transportation connections with the city, which in turn makes the access to services in the city difficult.

In December 2010, the city hall enforced the proposed measures and relocated the families from Coastei Street in Cluj Napoca to the newly built houses in Pata Rât. The measure caused a certain amount of disturbance among civic organizations and activists, worried about the decision, the consequences the relocated families are exposed to and resentful towards the manner in which the municipality implemented the measure. The activists specifically required the City Hall to design and implement policies that comply with the recommendations of the European Commission and United Nations regarding the promotion of social inclusion and social protection of vulnerable categories of people.

The discussion with GLOC’s founders revealed that the creation of the group has been marked by a combination of informality and precise response to a need for concerted action. The informality part refers to the emergence of GLOC out of already existing contacts between people and organizations that have been previously involved in specific issues related to the Roma communities. GLOC was therefore created largely through bringing together several actors that were already connected in various ways, a process facilitated by some of the members’ long experience in working with related issues. The existence of previous contacts between the future members facilitated their bringing together at the same
table by virtue of their common concern and discontent towards the relocation of families in Pata Rât. One of the GLOC members pointed out that diversity is precisely one of the advantages of the group, and that it allows “having competences and approaches from many areas of activity.” (C. Rat) The group is therefore characterized by internal diversity, but also by a great amount of informality.

In terms of administrative status, GLOC does not have an autonomous legal status in itself. The group brings together: the Amare Prhala Association (Fratii Nostri/Our Brothers) and the Desire Foundation (founding organizations, both from Cluj), Grupul pentru Acțiune Socială (GAS), Alianța Civică a Romilor din România, Romani Criss, Romano Suno, Resource Center for Roma Communities, Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, Castel Banffy Voluntary Association, Pro Roma Foundation, Fundația Comunitară Cluj, Fundația Română pentru Copil, Comunitate și Familie (FRCCF), AFMC Christiana, European Roma Rights Center, Critic Atac, Habitat for Humanity and academics of the Babeș-Bolyai University. The organizations brought together under its umbrella had each of them its own trajectory and portfolio.

The Amare Phrala Association in a non-governmental organization created in 1996 focused on the defense of interests of citizens of Roma ethnicity. The activities in which the Association has been involved since its creation include: the promotion of Roma culture and traditions, the promotion of equal access to quality education and of non-segregation in the field of education, anti-discrimination campaigns, lobby and advocacy activities in relation with state authorities, supporting Roma youth in accessing educational opportunities provided by the Ministry of Education within the affirmative action measures etc. The organization established communication with the most relevant institutions of municipality and county-level and belongs to the County Mixt Working Group (Grupul de Lucru Mixt la Nivel Judentean) the goal of which is to ensure a continuous communication between local and county level organizations and NGOs within collaborative actions promoted by the Romanian Government Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma.

The Desire Foundation has been founded in 1996 and aims to promote democratic civic culture, equality of rights and opportunities for all groups and people - regardless of their belonging to distinct gender, age or ethnicity categories - as well as the social and intercultural communication. Throughout the years the Foundation has been involved in numerous research activities on issues related to gender relations, nationalism, inter-ethnic relations, and the creation of networks bridging governmental and non-governmental organizations, educational projects as well as publishing and dissemination of research.

The two organizations worked together prior the creation of GLOC, before the actual relocation of the families was enforced. Together, they contacted the public authorities through open letters and sought to raise awareness and solidarity among various people in the community. According to Enikő Vincze, at that time, between the decision of the Local Council and the actual relocation of the Roma communities, the efforts were directed towards attracting the support of the non-governmental organizations and intellectual milieus that manifested sensitivity towards the events.
GLOC’s objectives

According to its own description, GLOC’s activities are guided by the following principles: De-segregation (social, residential and school-based); the eradication of isolation/ghettoization/stigmatization; social inclusion; equality of opportunity (including affirmative action); equal treatment and non-discrimination; active citizenship; the creation of conditions in which citizens can use their right to proper housing, and the right to a decent and dignified life, regardless of their social status and ethnicity.

The objectives set by GLOC are consistent with the above principles and target the following areas:

- Identifying solutions to remedy the situations resulted in the aftermath of evacuation from Coastei Street from Cluj Napoca;
- Identifying temporary and long term solutions for proper housing for these families as well for those under the risk of being evacuated;
- Actions of monitoring, lobbying and advocacy; civic protests;
- Attempting to solve problems by invoking the legal means;
- Participation in the elaboration of a housing policy which would provide access to houses for population in general and in particular for disadvantaged groups and Roma communities.

Because GLOC does not function like a regular NGO, with formal status and strict rules, there are no actual membership criteria. Cristina Rat, one of the members of GLOC, eloquently expressed this approach by pointing that GLOC is primarily “a loose coalition of people that stay informed about the same issue.” And she added “we do not have regular meetings, or regular events. We organize events where all the GLOC members are invited. However, usually to those events we also invite the wider public”.

GLOC was created to respond to specific problems and as such there is a rather clear set of beneficiaries of GLOC’s intentions and actions. However, the mechanisms of representation of the Roma communities from Pata Rât by GLOC are not as straightforward. First, GLOC is not in itself an organization, but a collection of various organizations that cultivated contacts and relationships with the Roma communities for many years before the actual creation of GLOC. Many of those organizations therefore have their own history in terms of interaction with the Roma families and some continue to maintain those connections.

GLOC does not organize regular meetings with the representatives of the Pata Rât communities, but they do invite community members at each event and they go to site visits when necessary. Also, GLOC members are contacted by the representatives of the communities who signal to them specific problems such as the registration of children for the 1st grade in schools. This kind of connections is in fact closely related to what GLOC can and sought from the beginning to do. Cristina Rat pointed: “we do not have the competence in social assistance, or community mediation”; however what GLOC can do is to create and

maintain a “communication platform” particularly with respect to the local and national authorities.

When the idea of representation is raised a closely connected aspect is that of legitimacy. Usually legitimacy is either claimed by an organization/individual or accepted/questioned by others. Discussing with the GLOC members about the legitimacy aspects, especially in the relationship with the authorities, it turned out that legitimacy-related issues were not necessarily one of the directions where the blockages took place. There have been several instances in which the question of legitimacy has been raised in a slightly different manner, because the political organizations that represent the Roma claimed that GLOC was in fact representing a community who already benefited from representation, ensured by the ethnic political organizations.

The actors whose cause GLOC is acting for are the communities of families relocated through the eviction from December 2010, as well as those in danger of being evicted (Cantonulii) or that are faced with problems of marginalization and exclusion due to their location in Pata Rât garbage dump. It has been revealed, in this regard, that Pata Rât area is not a homogenous area, and besides the common issues of exclusion and marginalization each community has its own trajectory and specific needs.

Although, as previously shown the issue of representation is not straightforward, GLOC involved members of these communities in its actions, from meetings with representatives of authorities to public debates and street events. The contacts and communication with these communities are facilitated by the existence of previous contacts mediated by the organizations that are part of or collaborate with GLOC.

The other actors

Apart from GLOC and the communities from Pata Rât – of which the families relocated from Coastei Street are the newest – there are additional actors involved in more or less active ways in the situation under discussion: some with decision-making power – authorities, notably at local level – as well as other non-governmental actors with expertise and influential at national or international levels.

The most important local public institution involved in the Pata Rât situation is the Cluj Napoca City Hall. The representatives of GLOC never met with the mayor until March 2012, in a joint meeting with Amnesty International activists, yet they did formulate open letters and proposals of collaboration protocols meant to establish a framework of joint action between the city hall as an institution and the civic sphere actors interested in remediating the locative and social situation of the Pata Rât families. Usually, as pointed by the GLOC members interviewed, the vice-mayor has been the dialogue partner from the part of the City Hall. From the specific departments involved in both the implementation of the relocation measure as well as in the monitoring of the subsequent situation of the respective community, the Social and Medical Assistance Direction is among the most present.

Other public organizations contacted by GLOC throughout its activity since 2010 (local and central level): The County Council (Consiliul Judetean), Agentia de Dezvoltare Regionala Nord Vest (North West Regional Development Agency), Consiliul National pentru Combaterea Discriminarii (National Council Against Discrimination), Ministerul Dezvoltarii Regionale si Turismului (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism).

GLOC established important collaborations with international organizations which manifested their interest and concern towards the situation which Roma families are
confronted with after the relocation. Among these was Amnesty International, which acted both separately and in joint action with GLOC. As it will be later on developed in the ‘Process’ section, Amnesty also acts as a very useful communication platform for disseminating information about the developments of the communities’ situation, events organized by GLOC etc.

Another important international organization is United Nations Development Programme. UNDP Romania is currently a partner with GLOC and with the Cluj municipality in a project27 called “Model Project for making the most of EU Funds for Sustainable Housing and Inclusion of disadvantaged Roma (explicitly but not exclusively targeted) in Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area”, in which GLOC members participate voluntarily as monitors. The participation in this project is one of the greatest achievements of GLOC in its campaign.

An additional organization is European Roma Rights Center, the goal of which is “to combat anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma through strategic litigation, research and policy development, advocacy and human rights education.”28 Lastly, among the important international actors, the fact that the European Commission was present through Alexandros Tsolakis is of notable importance and has been mentioned by the GLOC members as adding value to the group’s effort of increasing the visibility and the salience of the Pata Răt problems.

III. THE CONTEXT

The relationships between the actors involved can be looked at from several perspectives. On the one hand there are the formal decision-making actors that have the legal authority in issues of housing, and social services that fall under the jurisdiction of municipality and that have competences in rather specific areas such as the environment. From the point of view of the sequence of steps that ultimately resulted in the 76 families being moved in Pata Rat, they have been the stakeholders active in defining the relocation as a necessity, formulating the solution of modular houses built on land purchased in Pata Răt and enforcing that decision through the actual evictions.

GLOC, and before the actual formation of GLOC the two initial collaborators, Amare Phrala and the Desire Foundation, took a stance contesting the appropriateness of the relocation to Pata Răt as solution, its actual implementation and urged for an approach that respected the inclusive strategies promoted throughout the European space. Therefore GLOC (and its predecessors since April 2010 until January 2011) reacted rather early in the sequence of steps and in fact started the entire relationship with the authorities, by virtue of contesting their decision. Moreover, through repeated contact of the authorities they attempted, as Prof. Vincze underlined, not only to criticize but also to collectively seek better solutions to problems that are not defined unilaterally, the organizations that were to form GLOC later on sent a proposal for a collaboration protocol with the City Hall of Cluj Napoca, in May 2010: “We wanted to show that we are not just criticizing the project, but instead we would like to think it through together. Is there a problem on Coastei street or on Cantonului street, let us see it, let us define it, analyze and find solutions...”.

The protocol proposal projected a collaboration between the city hall and a negotiation committee that represented the Roma from Cantonului Street and the Pata Rât area. The proposed collaboration meant the joint efforts of the two parts in the identification of solutions for the locative problems encountered by the Roma populations under discussion.

The arguments raised in the protocol proposal underlined the motivation for the need of action. Briefly, they concerned the following punctual aspects:

- Drawing the attention on the fact that moving the Roma families in a single designated area will lead to increased residential segregation via administrative decisions;
- The protocol proposal rejected the arguments that grounded the decision of the city council; according to the document, the city hall’s motivations - centered on issues of insalubrity and complaints made by the inhabitants from the area - are not a sufficient ground for the decision to evict all the families from the respective streets;
- The measure is interpreted as “an expression of institutional discrimination” which results in aggravating the socio-economic exclusion of Roma citizens who live in Cluj;
- The severity of the consequences with respect to the Roma communities under discussion is also tackled from the point of view of the additional dangers that their placement close to a waste dump inflicts upon their health, their access to medical and any kind of services, and the consequences related to marginalization and stigmatization.

The City Hall expressed its refusal to sign this protocol through a response letter (Letter No. 111351/803/12.07.2010). Such interactions are better illustrated in the next section, which discusses the actual process. However, this has been the beginning of the relationship between the city hall and the two organizations that several months later were to form GLOC. The relationship between the two evolved in a positive manner from lack of communication to both being involved as partners in a project together with UNDP.

In the month when GLOC was created, January 2011, the two founding organizations, Amare Phrala, together with Desire Foundation and the European Roma Rights Centre sent a letter addressed to President Traian Basescu, Prime Minister Emil Boc and the Mayor of Cluj Napoca, Sorin Apostu. The letter is important from at least two points of view: it made the issue known to the highest political levels and, more than that, it problematized the issue in legal terms, revealing the legal dimensions and flaws of the relocation measure. The forced eviction is interpreted as a “violation of Romanian and international law” and made clear the circumstances under which forced evictions can be justified.

Thus, the text quotes the conditions and the protection that must be applied and respected in the case of such relocations, among which “an opportunity for genuine consultation with those affected, adequate and reasonable notice for all affected persons prior to the scheduled date of eviction [...] evictions not to take place in particularly bad weather or at night unless the affected persons consent otherwise. [...] Evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human

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29 “Propunere pentru incheierea unui protocol cu privire la situatia locuirii intre reprezentanti ai romilor si primaria municipiului Cluj Napoca” (Proposal for establishing a protocol regarding the locative situation between representatives of Roma and the Cluj Napoca City Hall), 25.05.2010.
rights. Where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the State party must take all appropriate measures to the maximum of its available resources, to ensure that adequate alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, as the case may be, is available.”

The letter added that in the case of Coastei Street, “evictions took place in violation of these protections”.

**Impact of the relocation measure among the public**

It is rather difficult to estimate the exact extent to which the public received positively or negatively the measure taken by the Cluj municipality. Adrian Dohotaru referred to the echoes he sometimes found in the media, such as comments expressing satisfaction with the fact that the Roma have been relocated near the waste dump. Cristina Rat as well mentioned that she observed how “every time a piece of news about Roma is published, it almost instantly generates 20 racist comments”. While such illustrations are of course to be taken with caution, since it is impossible to extrapolate on their general applicability, they do however underline the inherent ethnic enclosing of the topic, which further feeds its controversial status. And as it will be later on discussed relative to the political context, it also opens the possibility for political instrumentalization.

With regard to GLOC’s campaign and actions, a very important thing that they tried to accomplish through the series of public events and street events organized was to raise community’s awareness and to also create certain sensitivity towards the destabilizing experience of forced relocations. This goal was only partially fulfilled, since, as Prof. Vincze observed: “the locative problems of the Roma communities are not the type of problems with potential to generate solidarity among ordinary people in Cluj”.

The political aspects of the context are important, because the decisions taken at the level of authorities have an inherent political significance. Moreover such contexts create the framework of power relations and prioritization of issues that will become the beneficiaries of time, effort and money from the local administration. While GLOC cannot act on the political scene, it can however lobby for the prioritization of topics the resolution of which they pleaded since 2011.

What is more, an aspect that relates to the context has to do with the perceived preferential treatment that authorities have for certain issues, according to their proximity to socio-economically defined interests. Thus, according to Dohotaru, who has been previously involved in other civic initiatives, the authorities respond discriminatorily to issues raised by the civil society, according to the type of interests that the issues is related to (more “middle class” resonating issues such as rehabilitating green areas). “[Authorities’] attention is conditioned by the type of issue approached.” In this regard, “they [the authorities] did not expect such an extensive mobilization, on a topic that was not middle class – green areas, public spaces – and in time they became more cooperative, but this happened rather late, after 3 or 4 more instances of street protest...”.

Bringing the discussion in the current temporal framework, the present context is one marked by local elections and a possible development with relevance for the Pata Rât communities is that their problems will be granted attention in the strategies implemented by the new local administration. Changes at the top level of the institutions – such as those

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31 The authors of the letter quote CESCR General Comment No. 7 from http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/959f71e476284596802564c3005d8d50?Opendocument.
brought by local elections – are likely to impact on the course of actions taken by the civic actors in their attempt to influence the authorities. One of the GLOC members explicitly pointed to this aspect: “we will definitely have a new mayor. But perhaps it will be a mayor of a different political color, with whom we will surely have to take things from the very beginning...Our collaboration is not yet institutionalized... ” (E. Vincze).

GLOC recently issued an appeal\(^{32}\) for the candidates to the City Hall and Local Council in which they ask them to consider, in the eventuality of their success, the inclusion in their package of measures issues meant to address the locative as well as social and economic difficulties of the Roma communities from Pata Rât.

### IV. THE PROCESS

This section discusses the actual steps taken by GLOC in addressing the specific problem that prompted its creation, the relationships developed along the way with the authorities as well as with other actors that were involved, one way or another, in the issue.

Throughout the campaign started after the evictions from December 2010, GLOC attempted in various ways and systematically to draw the authorities’ attention on the issue and to raise the awareness among the community. They wrote petitions, went to Local Council meetings, met with the representatives of the municipality (in meetings initiated by civic organizations), wrote letters to various organizations and institutions, organized debates, street protests, events where the community has been invited, together with representatives of the Pata Rât communities and representatives of civic sphere and various authorities. Prior to the actual creation of GLOC, the two founding organizations wrote a collaboration protocol with the municipality, which was rejected by the authorities.

Within the communication established since 2010 between the two organizations that were collaborating and only later founded GLOC and the City Hall, the initiator of actions has always been the civic side. This held true after the campaign gained more substance and participation, once GLOC was created. Meetings have been initiated by GLOC and its collaborators.

**What GLOC did**

The following subsection discusses several important moments in the activity of GLOC. They provide a very good framework for understanding the framing of the issue, the publics targeted by the events, as well as the extent to which local authorities participated or reacted in any way. Moreover, another component that will become visible is the participation of multiple actors and the actual functioning of partnerships that GLOC managed to establish.

To discuss the history and impact of GLOC’s activities demands going back to 2010, the year when the municipality took and enforced the decision to move the families to Pata Rât. As explained in the section on the issue, for a while it was rather unclear who was going to be moved, since the Local Council decision included references to both the families from Coastei

Street, as well as those from Cantonului Street. Coastei is located in the city center, Cantonului is near the Pata Rât area. The authorities were at that time ambiguous, yet there was a great relevance in precisely who was going to be affected by the relocation measure. It was important to know precisely which of the communities was to be affected by the relocation, because they had different situations. At the same time, the intention of merging Roma families in a separate, isolated area carried the same worrying message, regardless of which of the communities was going to be moved in the end. “Either way, it was not good – this idea of having a separate neighborhood on the garbage dump, or near it, a polluted and segregated environment.” (Enikő Vincze)

As the moment of the relocation came closer, the activists’ concern was directed towards informing and mobilizing the people. Enikő Vincze: “At that time, we collected several signatures of association. We thought that there should also be those from Dallas and Cantonului. We were demanding their being informed, their consultation, for them to be told what and how and when. Those from Coastei refused at that moment to associate with us. There was the Roma Party which used to intervene. In a way, they confiscated our lists and did not return them. They used to say it was their territory, we should not interfere and they will solve the problem.”

In January 2011, about a month after the relocation measure was enforced, the Desire Foundation, the Association Amare Phrala and the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance from Babes Bolyai University organized a public debate to which the City Hall had also been invited. The debate approached very precise topics like the reasons and the circumstances of the relocation, the procedures used by the authorities and the impact they had over the targeted population, the social consequences of the relocation etc. The City Hall did not participate, instead it sent a letter signed by the (at that time) mayor Sorin Apostu. The debate benefited from the participation of several persons from the relocated community.

During the debate the participants read the Appeal for Solidarity and Action against the project “Social houses in Pata Rât”, in which they explicitly criticized the measure and the procedural aspects of the relocation, referring to “the eviction procedures of the people from Coastei Street, out of their houses, without being notified well in advance, the rapid demolition of the houses, lacking a Court order and/or a public decision of the Local Council, and without any compensation...”34 The text of the appeal also included the description of the difficult and inappropriate parameters of the newly built houses in which part of the families have been relocated.

Adrian Dohotaru recollects the events from that period and the mixed expectations about the effectiveness and impact of the initiative: “I was rather skeptical about such conferences, because for issues defined in conflictual terms I think a street-level mobilization is needed [...] particularly because the authorities have been previously approached ....when authorities refuse to enter a dialogue, you need street mobilization in order to draw attention. This happened in January, when we already contacted the people from Pata Rât, and they agreed with the protest: we were more a sort of facilitators in this issue...”. Thus, a street protest was organized in Lucian Blaga Square in Cluj Napoca, close to the City Hall’s building.35 The main message of the event was “Sunt Rom, vreau sa traiesc in demnitate” – “I

33 The people from Coastei had been given 2 days to move out of their former houses. The houses were to be demolished and the land cleared. The notice was given to them on December 15th.
35 A short film of the protest can be watched here: http://www.femrom.ro/attitudinecivica.html.
am a Roma and I want to live in dignity.” The protest was attended by a number of representatives from communities relocated from Coastei Street. Adrian Dohotaru admitted that, in his opinion, the mobilization – in its street-visible form – should have occurred earlier, closer to the actual moment of the relocation, because as time went by, the trigger for mobilization diminished. “I was a bit disappointed that so few people got mobilized […] Here I think there is also a problem for the associations, the Roma associations that sometimes want to intermediate, that we are the representatives of Roma, the white, the outsider who wants to intermediate all this…In the end we made it, we got the authorization. I think that this should have been done in December and maybe then more people would have attended.”

The protest however was an important moment. According to Cristina Rat, the January 2011 protest was the first public protest of Roma. In the aftermath of the protest, the vice-mayor received the representatives of the relocated families, together with members of GLOC. At that time, the argument of the relocation – as understood by the municipality - was re-stated: “He said the same thing, that the situation on Coastei Street was not tolerable because they lived in unsuitable conditions, that this was the solution and that the city hall does not have land where to build social houses, that it has no social houses either.”

Still, in January 2011, GLOC sent a proposal for establishing a collaboration protocol with the City Hall. In the proposal GLOC presented its readiness to work together with the municipality in finding solutions for “the access to decent housing of vulnerable groups from Cluj”36. The groups under discussion included the families evicted from Coastei Street, the families from Cantonului as well as the disadvantaged groups of Roma (but not exclusively) in need for social housing.

Later that year, on April 8th (International Roma Day), GLOC issued a call for solidarity and action against the residential segregation of Roma. The appeal was issued several months after the evacuation of the families from Coastei Street from Cluj Napoca to Pata Rât. The appeal invoked the European-level strategy which encourages the integrated housing policies to be implemented at local level by the public authorities. The signatories pointed to the consequences that are inherent in the light of the authorities’ measures. These consequences are very complex because the issue in itself is intricate and entails aspects related to social inclusion (or the avoidance of segregation and ghettoization), issues of health protection for the communities that live in the area under discussion, an inefficient way of spending public money by using it for measures that act against social inclusion, and generally a deficient approach from the part of authorities in addressing the housing issues of the Roma families.

In June 2011 GLOC organized a workshop which benefited from the participation of representatives of several influential local (or locally represented) organizations, as well as national organizations (such as The National Council against Discrimination37), international organizations (Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Centre from Budapest, Open Society Foundation in Budapest, UNDP Romania) etc. The interest manifested by international organizations like UNDP, Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Centre

37 It must be noted that the City Hall had to pay a fine of 8000 RON, because its decision regarding the eviction had not been sanctioned by the National Council Against Discrimination. GLOC was the initiator of the complaint and the Council voted in unanimity that the relocation of Roam from Coastei Street to the garbage dump in Pata Rat was a discriminatory act according to the terms of OG 137/ 2000 regarding the prevention and sanctioning of all discrimination forms.
and European Commission has been pointed during the interviews as marking an important shift in the attitude of local authorities towards the idea of collaboration with GLOC. Representatives of the above mentioned organizations took part – together with other participants to the workshop organized by GLOC in June 2011, under the title “Getting closer-EU strategy for Roma and local realities”.

Prof. Vincze underlined the importance of all these organizations and the networks associated with them towards creating a favorable context in which authorities repositioned themselves towards GLOC and in general towards the way in which they tackled the problem. The fact that the situation created in December 2010 was already visible beyond the narrow local circles, attracting interest and creating reaction from internationally influential actors seems to have had an impact on the authorities’ perception of GLOC’s efforts. The 2011 workshop was thus a turning point in the interaction with the authorities. Cristina Rat recollects: “On June 10, we invited UNDP, the European Commission, European Roma Center, the representative of OSI. Soros Foundation has this initiative for Roma and within OSF there is this ‘Making the most of the EU funds for Roma’, so a special unit for facilitating the access to European funds on Roma issues. And they saw that for this particular problem there is a need for a European project, yet a project that needs to be written by a team. It cannot be written by the city hall. There is a need for a project that can coagulate the local authorities and the local civic initiative…the main applicant was UNDP and the project was selected. ”

The year 2011 has been marked by additional activities including GLOC’s campaign, of which the October 3rd World Habitat Day should be mentioned. The celebration of this day occasioned the organization of a protest in front of the Prefecture from Cluj Napoca38. The protest brought together activists, activists from Amnesty International, and people from the segregated areas.

In December 2011, one year after the evacuation of the families from Coastei Street, GLOC organized a public debate and a street march in order to recall the attention on the forced relocation of the respective families to the waste dump from Pata Rât. The spokesman of the families relocated from Coastei St. to Pata Rât, Ernest Creta read, on this occasion, a message to the public authorities from Cluj Napoca, in which he summarized the problems that the community relocated to Pata Rât is confronted with after the relocation39. Mr. Creta mentioned, among other things: the lack of jobs, lack of family doctor, lack of all facilities that they previously enjoyed while living in the city, problems related to public transportation, difficulties for children who can no longer access easily the services of the public library, the polluted air and of course the poor housing conditions.

The December 2011 public debate was encompassed by the street protest under the title Mars pentru Dreptate Sociala (March for Social Justice). The action was meant, as the debate, to remind the authorities and the wider public about the problems persisting in Pata Rât and to raise awareness over the consequences that the relocated families are facing. The march was promoted under the slogans: “Say NO to racialization of poverty”, “Say NO to the social injustice”, “Act AGAINST social marginalization!” The March has been followed by

38 Images from the event can be seen here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng9KMCp38dQ and here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNFRsdxMlJmY&feature=youtu.be; last visited May 2012.
39 A short recording from the public debate, with Ernest Creta’s message is available here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O7bmcKAtAM&feature=youtu.be last visited May 2012.
other activities – presentations, video projections, debates – at Casa Tranzit in Cluj Napoca. Among the videos presented there was also a video message from Amnesty International.  

This was not the only occasion for Amnesty to take a stance regarding the issue of the forced eviction of families from Coastei. They knew about the case and GLOC itself was active in drawing the attention on the situation. In January 2011 GLOC members made a visit in Pata Rât where they took photos of the houses in order to have evidence of the conditions in which the families live there in the new houses. They sent the photos to Amnesty. Gradually, they started to cooperate. Representatives of Amnesty took part in the workshop organized by GLOC in June 2011, discussed above.

The collaboration lasted and in March 2012, a new visit has been organized in Pata Rât. This time, there has also been a meeting with representatives of the Agency for North West Regional Development, activists from GLOC and, importantly, local authorities. Below there is an excerpt from the documentation made by Amnesty in the aftermath of the visit: “Although the representatives of the evicted families have addressed the municipality with their problems repeatedly, on 19 March, they discussed the issues with the mayor in person for the first time. The meeting was also attended by the activists from the Working Group of Civil Organisations (GLOC) and a delegate of Amnesty International. Together they informed the mayor about the inadequate housing conditions in the New Pata Rât. They were told one of their requests, to extend the bus service, was allegedly met with resistance by the residents of the nearby neighborhood. The activists expressed concerns that such justification disregards the rights of the inhabitants of Pata Rât who are also the citizens of Cluj-Napoca.”

The same month, GLOC organized, in the Unirii Square from Cluj the event called “Si eu sint gunoier” / “I am a scavenger too”. The event was organized as a reaction to the project that the Cluj County Council launched for building an Integrated Center for Waste Management. The reaction was against the unilateral vision of the authorities who only regarded the technical aspects of the issue and overlooked the need to integrate the Pata Rât communities. Many of the people who live on the garbage dump worked for years in selecting the waste. GLOC reacted against authorities’ unwillingness to consider the possibility of integrating this already active labor force in the new waste station that will be built, on the account that the project is technical.

In its efforts to diminish the exclusion effects induced by the relocation measure, GLOC placed a strong emphasis on involving the children from Pata Rât in various educational, cultural and sports activities that are usually difficult for them to access. A first step in this series of action was the participation of more than 10 children from Pata Rât in the children contest from the International Cluj Marathon from April 10th, 2011.

In December 2011, GLOC together with ELF School from Cluj organized at Tranzit House an event in which children from Pata Rât were given the opportunity to take part in games and creation workshops. Pictures from the event and of some of the decorations created

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42 A short film can be seen here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK2xm5FQD9w&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK2xm5FQD9w&feature=relmfu);
by participants can be seen on GLOC’s website. More recently, in June 2012, the Desire Foundation, together with Romano ButiQ Association and the Art Group DramAcum from Bucharest organized a five day drama workshop in which 15 children from Pata Rât took part. The show was presented at the Transilvania International Film Festival (TIFF) within the Diversity Day.

The actions described above are consistent with and speak for the understanding and framing of the problem, the way it emerged in GLOC’s campaign. The relocation was a measure taken by the municipality to address a locative problem. Yet the deficiencies clearly go beyond this particular measure and GLOC is aware of the multiple aspects related to Roma’s integration that need to be taken into account when pondering over specific instances. At the same time, there is a great amount of awareness as far as the scope of the possible action, given the resources and the likelihood of success.

“In Romania as elsewhere in Europe there are many coalitions and organizations that address the problem of Roma inclusion in general terms. We thought it would make no sense to try to replicate a very general framing at local level, with a handful of people. So we said from the outset that GLOC emerged as a response to a very concrete issue, which is the problem of the relocation and that this is where out interest will focus. ... Of course, we are aware that this is only a small piece and that similar things happen in Baia Mare, but with the resources we have, we can address the problem here, locally... ” (Cristina Rat)

However, apart from this practical approach of targeting the reachable levels of action, there is an obvious awareness that the problem is part of a wider malpractice of integration and that the consequences which the families face after the eviction cannot be circumscribed or addressed unilaterally. In this regard, it is relevant to note the criticism towards the perspective taken by the authorities’ understanding of the issue, as pointed by Prof. Vincze: “...it was clear that the City Hall went on considering that the problem is one of social assistance. There is still more to do, from our part, to contribute to a different framing, that people do not need social assistance, or not exclusively social assistance; social assistance does not solve structural problems, housing, jobs...”

An additional aspect that adds to the complexity of the issue has to do with the heterogeneity existing within the affected population, when considered in the wider context and if the focus is not narrowed to the families relocated from Coastei Street. As discussed earlier in this text, the families relocated in December 2010 from Coastei Street to Pata Rât are not the only ones confronted with issues of social exclusion and marginalization. There are also the communities from Cantonului Street (also in the area of the waste dump), who have lived there for about 10 years, in very precarious conditions and who were placed there under the title of a temporary relocation. Apart from them, there are the communities from the so called ‘Dallas’, an area at the waste dump that has been inhabited for about 20 years.

In this context, there are differentiations between these communities and the inhabitants recently relocated to Pata Rât from Coastei Street from Cluj perceive this difference of needs and differences in the acuteness of problems they are confronted with. Ernest Creta, the representative of the families evicted from Coastei Street to the New Pata Rât explicitly pointed to such differences of identities, trajectories and needs.

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“The city hall said <because there are those gypsies from Dallas, for 15-20 years now, very well, we will move them there too, because this is what the gypsies deserve. Because they are the same> unfortunately, or fortunately, we are not like those gypsies…”45. The existence of such differences and the possibility of frictions between communities with quite distinct trajectories have also been pointed during the interviews. Prof. Vincze mentioned the occasional competition between groups generated by a perception of unequal attention granted to them in the public events. In this sense, an important component is the “construction of internal solidarity”, which is a challenging task.

Going back to Mr. Creta’s brief statement, what is also clear besides the perception of difference from the older communities is that the understanding of the newly relocated families is that their situation can be defined in the terms of marginalization and injustice. “We do not want to live near the garbage dump. If the authorities made a mistake they ought to repair it and move us away from the garbage” What is more, there is a perceived sense of shame attached to the relocation to an isolated area “they put us up on the field, where no one can see us.”

The fact that the problem is not solely locative, and that the solutions for the locative problems chosen by the municipality are questionable, the fact that besides the Coastei Street families, Pata Rât accommodates further communities, that the consequences are not to be addressed unilaterally and that an integrated vision for the future management of Roma integration is needed, all of these elements have shaped the relationship developed in time with the decision makers (the City Hall in particular) and the remaining organizations that had various inputs.

Thus far, the discussion of GLOC’s various actions revealed that there have been numerous moments of communicational blank between the authorities and the civic actors. The city hall refused to sign two collaboration protocols, stepped back from attending events where they have been invited, with the exception, mentioned by Cristina Rat of the event from June 2011 when the head of the Social Assistance Department has been delegated to participate. An important problem pointed as an inhibiting force in the relationship with the city hall has to do with the hierarchical nature of state institutions. Communication with the top of the pyramid is difficult and mediated through the international organizations’ influence. “It is not enough to arrive to a personal, friendly relationship with the personnel to arrive to a common definition of the problem, a common approach, unless there is a top decision that ‘yes, we intervene’, ‘yes, we do’ [...] all these institutions are extremely hierarchical, moreover, the basis of the pyramid is so loaded with tasks, that even if there were good intentions... The City hall must first and foremost prioritize this problem and release the personnel designated to take care of the problem from additional tasks.”

Moreover, there have been important aspects where the two parts did not agree. For example, an important issue is that of a proper and accurate definition of the status that the new houses where part of the Coastei families have been moved in, in Pata Rât. There is, in this sense, an important difference between social houses and necessity houses. Cristina Rat explained the difference between the two and why it is important for the families to have the status of the houses clear. “The difference, from the point of view of those relocated, is that, if you have a necessity house, you can apply for a social house. However, if you already live in a social house – and they did sign a contract for 2 years – you cannot apply for a social

45 Ernest Creta speaking about the situation of the families after the relocation to Pata Rat at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GimICVnfgVI.
house.” According to this logic, designating those houses as ‘necessity houses’ was useful to justify the fact that they were not included on the list of social houses and they were distributed randomly. According to Cristina Rat, however, in many of the public documents of the Local Council the houses are referred to as social houses.

The fact that from 2010 until now there have been important positive changes in the overall relationship with the authorities has been pointed out and it will be developed more extensively in the last section of this study, being relevant for the outcomes. However, there are still several aspects that can complement the picture of the process. One of them has to do with the interaction of GLOC and the authorities, seen from the perspective of GLOC’s nature: an informally created umbrella of multiple organizations and an entity that brings together many academics and other affiliated individual members. In this regard, the fact that GLOC includes quite a lot of members associated with the university was not in itself an advantage, according to Cristina Rat. At least not on the short run, when a pragmatic approach could prove effective: “we tend to problematize things, to see how complex they are, and indeed they are so complex that sometimes we do not know exactly what needs to be done. From this point of view, I think a very outspoken NGO might have been able to negotiate better concrete improvements for the families…”.

However, on the long run, there were also advantages, particularly for the sustainability of the entire campaign. An important element in this sense was the fact that “we brought in the technical expertise of the Architects’ Order. We had a workshop called <About social housing> to which we invited the elite...[...] the expertise, even though not neutral, is a technical one and could reveal that those houses don’t meet any criteria...somehow it gave a technical weight, because the technical weight sounds good, particularly in mass media...”.

The other important feature of GLOC – the fact that is an informal, legally not autonomous, entity is perceived as an advantage when contrasted to more articulated and formalized structures, from the point of view of involvement and motivation to get involved. Adrian Dohotaru argued in this regard: “Institutionalized civil society is project-based. And I believe this is a wrong logic. In a representative type of democracy in which you have institutionalized civil society which intermediates between the state and the capital, somehow separating of the two...how do they separate? This is impossible for as long as the funds come from either the state or through multinationals’ CSR programs [...] On the other hand, this more spontaneous, more informal model can work better because it works outside the project-based logic: I apply, I get money and then I get involved. [...] Do I get motivated only when paid for one project or another? No, I think it should come naturally, when democratic values are internalized...”.

V. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

This section summarizes the discussion from the previous parts of this study by making reference to the short and long term results in terms of decisions, impacts, and changes in the relationships between authorities, civic actors and affected publics. Before that however it would be useful to remember the diverse array of actions and initiatives in which GLOC was involved throughout its activity from the beginning of 2011: letters, petitions, appeals, public debates, street protests, cultural events, meetings with representatives of the authorities and of other relevant organizations and institutions, site visits in the communities from Pata Rât. Throughout the sequence of initiatives and actions, GLOC succeeded – and this is largely also
a result of its status as an umbrella of more organizations, involved in multiple networks – to establish important contacts and collaborations with national and international organizations. Additionally, it established collaborations with other actors from the local community, such as the Elf School with whom they partnered in one of the events.

Whereas the specific problem that triggered the formation of GLOC – the eviction of families to the Pata Rât garbage dump – is far from being resolved, there have been important accomplishments in at least three areas: the relationship with the authorities, the empowerment of the communities directly affected by the current or prospective measures of the municipality and the advancement in the local discourse of an issue that was not sufficiently salient in the community. Recently, GLOC welcomed the decision of the local public transportation company RATUC to introduce – as a pilot measure – an additional bus that connects the center with the area near the garbage dump. This is an important step towards facilitating at least to some extent the access of families located in the remote areas to the city center.

In terms of the relationship with the authorities, the progress was acknowledged by all the GLOC members interviewed for this study. According to Cristina Rat, currently, one can speak about the existence of collaboration between GLOC and the city hall. However, she added “this collaboration, that works between us and the personnel from the Department of Social Assistance and the Technical Department for European Projects does not mean that the mayor or the city hall as a political institution guarantees the political will for improving the situation from Pata Rât.” However, despite the rather long series of differing standpoints, it can be said that a general agreement exists now on that the problem is not only a locative one, but “there is a need for an integrated approach, to simultaneously address the fact that people with jobs will keep their jobs, children can go to school, but they can also access after-school programs, that there is a need for a de-segregation policy…” (C. Rat)

The change in the relationship between the two actors is also to be interpreted as partially resulting from a shift in the strategies assumed by GLOC in response to authorities’ initial reluctance to cooperate. In this regard, the discussions revealed that to some extent cooperation from the authorities was perceived as being a result of pressure coming from international organizations, such as Amnesty International, UNDP. An example, in this sense, underlined by Dohotaru refers to the insistence on the need to solve the problem of the relocation and marginalization in the prospect of Cluj becoming a candidate for the title of European cultural capital. “We told them: if we tell Amnesty International […] that Cluj is faced with a major problem, having the biggest ghetto in Europe close to a garbage dump […] and if we ask them for several public statements about their position on this situation, a city that wishes to get such a title, what do you think their reaction might be? And then we saw a bit of an opening….” This type of strategy that involved GLOC’s networking and collaboration with Amnesty, UNDP, European Commission and European Roma Right Center was confirmed by E. Vincze too as the approach that seemed most effective for the authorities to become responsive.

The relationship with the authorities also changed in the sense that it moved from conflicting terms towards a strategy where GLOC came with solutions, at least in the sense of presenting the authorities the possibility to assist them with accessing financing. The authorities too relaxed their initial position about the absolute appropriateness of relocation (defined by them as moving the families in better conditions). However, this was not, according to Dohotaru, a publicly assumed position, rather an informal acceptance that “perhaps it was not the best solution”.

All this considered, GLOC and the City Hall are now partners in a 6 months project, and this collaboration is a significant accomplishment. 46 “There is now this collaboration with UNDP, and through UNDP we got to sit at the same table with the City Hall. In this 6 months project we have this monitoring role, which we need to take very seriously so that those objectives will be reached or not move into a different direction. Most important of all is perhaps the project that should be prepared to benefit from funds for housing and, again, to use our professional expertise when constructing a housing project…” (E. Vincze)

Cristina Rat sees this project as the most important result of what GLOC succeeded to so far and she is confident about is outcomes. She also mentioned among the most important results of GLOC’s campaign “the involvement of the lawyers from European Roma Center and Romani Criss, who brought the case in the court, and the fact that CFR (the Railways Company) lost the trial” 47.

Apart from these developments, there are also the accomplishments regarding the status of the Roma communities. Cristina Rat argues in this regard: “I think the most important thing that GLOC did was that it gave voice to a community […] this was the most important role played by GLOC, we created a space where these people can participate and present their own problem […] the fact that they took part in all events, they spoke, they participated – I think was very important.” A similar message resonates also from Adrian Dohotaru, for whom “the mobilization of people from Pata Rât and of some representatives of the local civil society is the greatest achievement. Although contention in itself is not an achievement… it can be an accomplishment in the sense of placing an issue on the public agenda.” This is an additional level at which the discussion about results can be carried that of community, and here too the general feeling is that there are still things to be done.

The awareness about the problems in Pata Rât and the connected perceptions of the community regarding the minority populations are issues that GLOC members feel they need further work in the future. Dohotaru argued in this sense: “It seems to me that for the time being at the level of Cluj, in general, the fact that so many people are placed there [in Pata Rât] is not perceived as problematic. Many people simply refuse to think of this as being a problem, they refuse to believe…”

The perception issues at the level of both community and authorities are long term challenges and the need to address them in a consistent matter has also been pointed out by Prof. Vinzce who observed that “The perception is rather negative, the perception about the minority population […] that those Roma got what they deserved, that is where they should be, that there is too much concern for the Roma, when Romanians too are poor […] these very strongly entrenched ideas should be changed because otherwise it will not work, even if we succeeded in bringing projects that would change something in those people’s lives”.

46 The UNDP Representative: “We are working with the authorities so that they can use the resources of the European Funds and to make sure that they can find a sustainable solution for the people from Pata Rât. On behalf of my organization, we are very thankful to the Open Society Institute which has financed the partnership between the Municipality of Cluj-Napoca and UNDP. The idea is that we put together all our expertise, work together with the communities and identify quick fundable projects that could bring European Structural Funds to Cluj-Napoca for the benefit of Roma communities”; at http://www.undp.ro/news/?item_id=3303, last visited May 2012.

47 The reference is to the trial against the inhabitants of Cantonului Street, who live in the area of Cluj Napoca East Station. The Cluj Napoca court decided to reject CFR’s request.
Trying to affect changes at the level of the community’s perceptions is then to be paralleled by systematic attempts to affect changes in the way the authorities place themselves towards such issues and understand to act from their decision-making position. Thus, in Enikő Vincze’s opinion, “this problem entails several general other problems, for example the relationship between authorities and citizens. The fact that we militate for certain rights for these people means that we also militate for a different way of doing local public administration, to consult citizens when having an urban development plan…to change something in this area too…”
Case Study No. 3

Citizens’ Initiative Group Callatis (Grupul de initiativa cetateneasca Callatis) – Bucharest

The Rehabilitation of Istru Park

An overview

The Citizens’ Initiative Group Callatis from Bucharest (from now on referred to as Callatis/the Group) was created in August 2010, as part of the project “Back to the Grass roots” implemented by CeRe (Centre of Resources for Public Participation). The project focused on community organizing initiatives and targeted the improvement of the way in which citizens from specific communities manage to get together on the grounds of common interests and act collectively in order to solve the problems identified in their neighborhoods. For this purpose, citizens need to identify their problems, the possible solutions to address those problems, as well as the methods to involve the authorities in effectively solving the situations to be remedied.

The above mentioned project was unreeled in 4 districts and six neighborhoods from Bucharest. In order to identify and prioritize the group’s objectives they organized neighborhood surveys, a method that CeRe advised them to use: “The group’s objectives were organized according to the priorities, after conducting a survey in the neighborhood, as CeRe advised us to do” (Elisabeta Blaga, Callatis)

In terms of the Group’s objectives, in January 2011, for instance, one of Callatis’ members (Mr. Sarion) published on the blog a list of them. Among these:

- To keep a complete and updated record of the blocks’ administrators and known representatives from each block of flats;
- To collect information about the number of persons from the district as well as other details that can help create some relevant categories;
- To establish a permanent relationship with the authorities.

Other specific, concrete and short-term objectives:

- To ask the City Hall for a complete situation concerning the thermal rehabilitation as well as other similar projects;
- To introduce an extra tax for pets’ owners - the money will be redirected for street cleaning;
- To introduce a fine for car owners that park on green spaces.
The above mentioned objectives, published by Mr. Sarion on the group’s blog were rather broad, and assumed the involvement of various institutions; moreover not all the members of the Group embraced them as such. Consequently, they started with rather small steps: “We started with something easy that implied only collaboration with the district City Hall and ADP - the rehabilitation of an alley between two schools: one for deaf children and one for children with special needs that are situated in the center of the district, like an island, without an alley to link them with the rest of the district. In 2010, on St. Dumitru’s Day we inaugurated the alley.” (Elisabeta Blaga, Callatis)

Therefore, even though the Group started identifying a number of priorities and objectives, in time they adjusted the list of priorities in accordance with the immediate needs of the population and with the available resources. At present, Delia Mihalache, one of the active members of the group, identified the following objectives:

1. “To solve concrete problems identified by the neighbors, for example: the cleaning and rehabilitation of the alley between the two schools; to eradicate a playground that was situated under the windows of some inhabitants; or the rehabilitation of Istru Park.

2. To monitor the activity of district 6 City Councils, City Hall and other subordinated institutions for revamping green spaces and public security. As much as we could we attended the City Hall’s meetings and we strongly opposed to spending the public money without thinking.

3. To increase the community cohesion: indeed, we visited almost all the administrators and block of flats’ presidents, trying to inform them about our initiatives and to include them in our common projects; we tried to bring new members in the group, in order to be able to cover all the problems we want to tackle; we keep contact with the citizens’ initiative groups from other districts or neighborhoods.”

I. THE ISSUE

Callatis is a neighborhood level initiative group and therefore the issues the group is addressing are local and rather particular to their district and neighboring areas. “We are trying to solve important issues that affect more than one citizen from the district, at least the citizens from one block of flats. For instance, the survey conducted by the CeRe community organizer, before our first district meeting in 29.07.2010 revealed that the most stringent problems from our district are: insufficient parking lots, bad state of green and entertainment spaces, citizens ‘security, dirty streets, difficult and un-transparent thermic rehabilitation as well as the issue of street dogs.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis)

In this regard, the group’s approach was to address all particular situations each at their turn: the cleaning and rehabilitation of a pedestrians’ area situated between two schools; the reconfiguration, at citizens’ request, of a playground that was situated too close to a block of flats; the cleaning and modernization of two district parks; the revamping/reconfiguration of a park, according to citizens’ proposals; the establishment of a minimal dialogue with the local public authorities thorough participation to City Council’s meetings, public debates or other public events. In the present case-study, besides the participation in City Council’s meetings, “there was one public debate, 3 audiences at ADP and one neighborhood public event”. (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).
The present case-study focuses on one of these issues, namely the initiative to redesign and reconfigure a park – called the Istru Park – in the Drumul Taberei area, that has a long and complex history.

It all started in the year 2000, when the Istru Park’s area has been diminished for building 3 blocks of flats. The decision was taken by the City Council without any consultations with the citizens or civil society representatives. The residents living in the nearby area started to protest against this decision through petitions, manifestations but also through the presence of mass-media: “They opposed the bulldozers and the excavators that were about to start the construction of new blocks of flats on the green space” (text by Ionut Dulamita, Think Outside the Box).

The pressures made by the residents forced the authorities to maintain one part of the area functioning as a park. The Citizens’ Initiative Group Callatis was formed later, in August 2010. The residents, with the help of a community organizer, identified their main priority was alongside the bad state of the Istru Park, “that was the moment when Callatis interfered, due to the bad state of the park, pointed out by several mothers” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis). Even though the issue of the park was identified by the entire community, the salient conflicts among the new and old residents started to emerge: “We started the talks with the City Council from district 6 and the ADPDU in order to rehabilitate the park; not knowing that the existing conflict within the community, would make us find and propose common solutions agreed by the vast majority of the residents so difficult...” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

Indeed, the salient conflict between the old residents and the residents from the new blocks was somewhat present, but was discovered only later in the process. The Group found out about the history of this Park only in 2011, when they proposed the first project of rehabilitating the Park: “In October 2011, at the public event Neighborhood’s Day, when we proposed a project for rehabilitating the park, we found out about the wettered history of the Istru Park and the residents’ fight to keep the park. (Delia Mihalache, Callatis) Moreover, it was only in mid-2012, when the group found out about the conflict between the old and the new residents: “we found out only in April 2012 during some concrete discussions over the rehabilitation project, from one of the neighbors that was directly involved in the initial conflict with the authorities to maintain the park, as well as in the conflict with the new ANL residents.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis)

This later identified conflict within the community was perceived by some members, “as something that disrupt citizens and therefore the simple problems like maintenance and rehabilitation were impossible to address in an organized and sustained way” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis). Still, since the conflict was visibly present only in some rather recent discussions it was managed by the group, allowing the group to focus on a common strategy: “We tried to resolve this conflict and to discuss with all the interested persons in order to reach a solution to rehabilitate the park agreed by everybody” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

II. THE ACTORS

The actual formation of the Initiative Group Callatis is strongly linked with the project implemented by CeRe. The creation of Callatis was the result of a process replicated in all neighborhoods where CeRe implemented its community organizing project. However, it must be underlined that prior to the actual formation of the group, many of the members
experienced individual attempts to solving problems using tools like petitions and complaints addressed to the local authorities. The individual efforts however do not always turn successful: “Many of us felt the need for such a way of working, more organized and more efficient in the long run” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

The need for more efficiency has been advanced as the basis for the formation of the group. In addition, an advantage of the collective action that a group involves relates to the aggregation of various competences and experiences that the members may use in the process of problem solving. “We want to live in a cleaner, safer and nicer neighborhood; we want citizens’ priorities to be known and taken into account by the local public authorities and their decisions to be subject to public debate, adopted in a transparent fashion, according to the existing laws.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

The group on which this case study focuses, is, as earlier pointed out, part of the CeRe project “Back to the Grass Roots”, which started under the general aim of mobilizing and including the citizens from Bucharest in the public decision-making process that affects them directly. The project aimed to assist the establishment and functioning of 6 citizens’ groups from 6 districts and 4 neighborhoods in Bucharest. The project started in 2009 in two districts, and later, in 2010 developed and embraced other 4 areas. Consequently, the 6 areas where the project exists are: Lacul Tei, Drumul Taberei, Grivita-Titulescu, Callatis-Drumul Taberei, Maica Domnului and Dristor.

The community organizers involved in the projects implemented a method widely spread in America, but rarely used in the Romanian context. The first phase used was the so-called Listening phase. In each district/area where the project was implemented around 100-120 interviews were conducted with ordinary citizens: “The Listening phase is guided by some interview guides that sometimes are shorter and sometimes longer, with the citizens from the districts where we work. We don’t have a database, we go from door to door […]. After we have the 100-120 interviews we make the statistics and see what are the most stringent issues and most importantly how many citizens see these issues as real issues” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

The next phase is the attempt of organizing the actual citizens’ initiative groups. In doing this, the community organizers go back in the district and approach the citizens that showed greater interest for participating in solving the identified issues. These citizens were invited to participate in several meetings together with the community organizers: “We have longer meetings with these people, in which we explain to them what, and how they can do things for their district and we organize the initiative group. This is what also happened in the case of Callatis.” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

After these first meetings, the initiative group is assisted in organizing a neighborhood meeting with citizens. During this meeting, the group presents the issues identified in the survey and asks for citizens’ debate and voting on the most stringent issue: “they invite the citizens to vote for the problem they want to be tackled first. This is how the issue the group is in charge of is chosen” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). The group has an informal status, therefore lacking the features that an established NGO involves. The simplicity of the informal structure is considered an advantaged because it makes it more operational and easy to manage during the actual activity.

In 2011, the Callatis Group had 8 permanent members and 2 associate members. Within the group, the members organized alongside specific roles: photo reporter, blog/Facebook account administrator, comments and proposals, field worker, internet documentation and
minutes, relation with authorities and mediator. Each of the members chose their roles voluntarily and based on their interest. They don’t have an office but they met regularly at the No. 144 School. During these meetings, the members also set very clear deadlines and people that are in charge with the accomplishment of the activities.

The group has permissive rules with regard to the membership criteria, being open for all citizens who are interested in the specific problems of the neighborhood. However, there is a certain differentiation between the members, built on the degree of activism. Thus, the active members are those who “participate frequently to the weekly meetings, take on responsibilities during those meetings or during the events organized by the group. In fact, we have a group of four people who are permanently active, three people who contribute quite often to the group activities and three more people who help from time to time. There is however a permanent fluctuation of members; people join us when they wish to solve a certain problem, yet they usually do not come back once the problem has been solved.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

Even though the group is permissive in terms of membership and involvement of citizens, it also encounters the problem of apathy and lack of participation. Most people agree on the importance of the identified issue but they are reluctant to actively participate in the solving process. “Most of them say that they don’t have time, that they can’t…” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer, CeRe).

III. THE CONTEXT

This section describes the channels of citizens’ participation, the relationships between actors and the wider political environment in which the civic action emerged and developed. Even if the measure that this study is focuses on is rather of small amplitude, as the following sections will reveal, there are multiple aspects, some of them of political nature, that affect the extent to which civic initiatives can be successful and enduring.

The context of citizen participation in the decision-making at local level is based on the following legislative acts:

- Law 544/2001 – concerning the free access to public information (later modified and by Law 371/2006; Law 380/2006; Law 188/2007) stipulates that all the citizens or other actors interested in any information or documents that are related to the activity of public authorities, institutions and related autonomous administration. The Law includes the methodological norms of implementation as well as samples of claim, administrative complaint, answer to complaint or answer to claim.

- Law 52/2003 – concerning the transparency of decision-making in public administration, regulates the possibility of intervening in the decision-making process and the obligations of authorities to facilitate the public’s participation in the decision-making. The Law was completed with Law 242/2010 that introduced two important aspects: the possibility for citizens to intervene in the process of initiating public policy proposals (in this sense, the citizens are allowed to attend the public meetings and to add proposals, suggestions or recommendations to the normative acts) and the obligation of authorities to give a written justification for the recommendations that were not taken into consideration.


In addition to the more general legal framework, what is relevant for the case under discussion is the specific legal framework within the City Hall in district 6: The Integrated Plan for Urban Development (Planul Integrat de Dezvoltare Urbana, from now on PIDU). In Art. 5 from PIDU there is a clear mention of the possibility for dialogue with the district’s public sphere, dialogue that implies not only information or consultation, but actual participation: “The identified space enters a strong dialogue with the citizens. In this context the aim goes beyond only information [...]”. As previously mentioned, the local authorities are obliged by law to engage the citizens in the process of public decision-making. Moreover, the citizens and other NGOs’ representatives can approach the local authorities through letters, petitions, but can also attend City Council Public Meetings.

Still, there are some limitations in terms of the design features of public decisions which allow/disallow public participation. In our specific case-study, the councilors adopted the Regulation for the organization and functioning of district 6 City Council’s meetings (HCLS6 nr. 9/29.01.2009), which clearly stipulated the conditions for citizens to intervene in the local policy- or decision-making processes. In this respect, Art. 4.5 from chapter 4 states that: “The district 6’ City Council meetings are all public, with the exception when the councilors decide with majority voting for closed-doors’ meetings. Problems concerning local budget, the administration of public and private domain within district 6, participation in urban development or cooperation programs and the rehabilitation of public domain are always discussed in public meetings” (HCLS6 nr. 9/29.01.2009). In addition, citizens or NGO representatives are allowed to attend the meetings organized by the City Council departments. Another very important stipulation refers to the fact that during all these meetings citizens are allowed to address the City Council, without the right to vote (Art. 4.14 from HCLS6 nr. 9/29.01.2009). Still, for an ordinary citizen to be able to talk during the meeting needs to be approved by the Chair of the City Council’s meeting.

Even though the Regulation described before allows for significant room for citizens to get involved in the local decision-making processes, there are however particular cases where the councilors tried to limit their access: “Indeed, at the City Council’s meeting in January 2012, the Chair of the meeting told the members of the Callatis Group present at the meeting that they were allowed to talk only through a councilor, at the end of the meeting during the interpellation section.” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer, CeRe).

Despite the particular limiting case mentioned above, the group began its interaction with the authorities soon after its formation. One of the founding members of the group recollects the early moments of the group’s activity: “we took part in a meeting of the Local Council of District 648 and read, at the end of the meeting, during the questions and answers

48 Bucharest is divided in 6 administrative units = districts (“sectoare”).
part, a brief presentation of the group and its objectives. We introduced ourselves and told the authorities what the priorities of citizen were” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis). The group continued to contact the authorities as new problems emerged on the agenda, as well as in situations when the authorities failed to provide the required answer. Thus, the group followed an approach in which they systematically contacted the authorities seeking to have an input in the debates over the possible solutions for the problems. At the same time, they sought “to find an acceptable solution, but as close as possible to the requests formulated by citizens.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

The status of the Istru Park has a rather long story, dating, according to Delia Mihalache, since 12 years ago when “its surface was diminished by the authorities in order to build 3 blocks of apartments.” The fact that the park succeeded to survive is the result of citizens’ reactions, because they protested against the measures taken by the authorities. As the worsening state of the park has been indicated by several mothers, the Callatis Group reacted and signaled the problem to the competent authorities. More specifically, they asked the Local Council of District 6 and ADPDU⁴⁹ responsible for District 6 to intervene for the park. Delia Mihalache pointed to the difficulty they faced in arriving at a solution regarding the redevelopment of the park that could be considered satisfactory for everyone.

In May 2011, the Group sent a petition to ADP in which they asked for the rehabilitation of three neighborhood parks, petition left without any response. Subsequently, the focus was shifted on Istru Park only. The solution they were presented with was not considered satisfactory. According to Iustina Neagu, the scenario advanced by the authorities involved the enclosure of the park with a fence, the rationale being that otherwise the park would soon deteriorate, unless protected. Still, the Group was not content with this solution. In October 2011, they had a subsequent attempt to attract the authorities’ attention on the need to rehabilitate the park. They had, this time, very specific requirements related to the rehabilitation: “replacing the old, deteriorated playing equipment, supplementing it, redoing the green areas…” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). They also asked for the replacement of the sand around the playground with a special kind of material (‘anti-trauma’ surface) that would reduce the risk of children getting injured. They wrote a new petition in which they asked for the above measures to be taken, and the petition was again left without response. The same month, the Group, assisted by CeRe organized an event which brought together citizens and authorities.

The means of communication used in the interaction with the local authorities (the district City Hall and the Local Council of District 6) included “petitions, letters, participation to the meetings of the Local Council and written interpellations read during these meetings, meeting at the ADPDU District 6 […] public events organized in the neighborhood”. There seems to be a consistent pattern in regard of the actor that usually initiated the meetings organized as part of the interactions established between the Callatis Group and the authorities. The Group has always been the initiator of meetings. This lack of symmetry has been encompassed by difficulties encountered by the group in terms of access to public information: “the answers fail to come or they come late (later than the 30 days stipulated by law), often lacking the information that was required, being instead formulated in the well-known administrative ‘wooden language’” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

In terms of the wider social and political context, the affected group was part of the naming and framing process and consequently was aware of the problem. As mentioned earlier, the naming and framing of the Istru Park issue was done using community organizing methods. The citizens were asked, in a short interview, to identify the issue they think is the most stringent. Later, the issue that was considered important for most of the citizens was considered as being the issue of the group. The process of finding solutions followed the same track and engaged citizens through meetings and discussions. Even though the group was most of the times cohesive and focused on the same common goal, as mentioned in a previous section, there were some cases when a part of its members started fighting against the general view of the group.

This situation emerged, for instance, during an audience with the ADPDU president, when one member distinguished from the rest of the group and tried to impose his own point of view: “...during the meeting he started saying that he wants some more toys in that part of the park. At that moment, the other members of the group started to tell him that he already had the chance of saying so, during the consultation period” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). Indeed, it is important to note this aspect in order to stress the difficulty in getting to a common goal or strategy, accepted by all the involved parts. In addition, as mentioned in the previous section, the conflict was rather sporadic and the group managed to overcome such divergences of opinion. This attitude made the group appear to the representatives of ADPDU weak, un-cohesive and easy to manipulate. This situation perpetuated in another joint meeting, this time in the Istru Park, when one of the group members created a delicate situation born out of misunderstandings and hasty evaluations made under pressure. In the end, “...He told me he was withdrawing from the group” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

Even though the group had to face the issue of occasional disagreement within the local community, they managed to obtain what they wanted. The group had significant support coming from both civil society and the political realm. The support coming from the civil society was mostly directed through CeRe and the community organizer that assisted the group the entire process. The interesting and surprising thing was the support coming from the political side. During the City Hall meetings, one of the opposition parties (in this case the PNL – the National Liberal Party) took the group’s side and helped them in several occasions. The help consisted in one of the counselors reading the Group’s interpellation during a meeting and helping them with accessing information they needed.

In the City Hall meeting organized for approving the local budget, the assistance from the PNL councilor proved very useful. Iustina Neagu recollected that during that meeting a peculiar situation emerged as the president of the meeting refused to let the citizens speak unless a councilor would do that for them. This was unusual in the sense that normally, citizens have the right to be consulted at the beginning of the meetings, when the recommendations from the part of civil society are read. The Group had a set of recommendations prepared, because what they were trying to do was to prevent the budget from being approved in the version that was initially drafted. The Group asked the many councilors in the room about the possibility of them reading the set of recommendations. Only one person raised his hand, the councilor from PNL who in the end read the document prepared by Callatis.

This situation helped the group in its initiative but at the same time raised suspicion from the authorities’ side that the group is politicized and controlled by the opposition party – PNL. The context is, however, intricate and it is difficult to be certain about the precise extent
to which such perception guided the attitude that the authorities developed towards the Group and its requests. The other important aspect to take into consideration when discussing the social and political context refers to the Callatis Group’s relationship with mass-media. Mass-media plays a crucial role in both receiving and transmitting information towards the citizens. In this sense, CeRe is assisting the Callatis Group initiatives to approach and include mass-media in their activities. Consequently, it is through CeRe that the media gets the needed information: “Every time we have an activity with one of the initiative groups we let everybody from our database know about it; our PR sends press releases and invitations for events.” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

Nevertheless, the group acknowledges the fact that this relation with the media is not enough, since if there is an action where they need the media to put some pressure on the local authorities, it is rarely the case where the press is responding in great numbers: “there were never more than two or three journalists present at an action or an event” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

Analyzing the entire process of rehabilitating the Istru Park, it was obvious to see that the Group managed to intervene in several levels of public participation. It all started at decision-making level, when the group participated in the initiation process, but also attended the City Hall and ADP meetings when the decisions concerning the park were taken. Even though the group participated in these levels of public participation it was limited in terms of actual power. Still, the group not only participated in the decision-making process but also in the implementation stage. In this sense, the Group invited the ADP president in the park in order to show him the rehabilitation plan and to monitor whether their claims are taken into consideration: “Before we left his office we convinced him to come and visit the park in two days’ time. We prepared for this meeting. He showed us the rehabilitation plan that was almost identical to our proposal; it was actually a copy of our plan.” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). Since the rehabilitation barely started in the park, it was impossible to determine whether the group was able to also participate in the monitoring level of public participation.

IV. THE PROCESS

The group works like an interface between individual citizens and the local authorities and therefore, there are necessary linkages established between the group that signals the problems further to the authorities and the citizens who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the proposed solutions. Subsequently, maintaining a continuous communication with the citizens is of outmost importance.

Moreover, the Group seeks to develop and nurture the communication with the administrators and the people in charge with the administration of buildings (“presedinti de bloc”). According to Delia Mihalache, there are continuous efforts to “keep them posted with our initiatives and involve them in common projects”. What is more, “we try to bring new members to the group, in order to have a better coverage of the problems we seek to solve. We keep in touch with other initiative groups from other neighborhoods.” (Delia Mihalache).

The permanent link with the citizens is thus possible and enables the identification of concrete and pressing problems that people are confronted with. Citizens often signal themselves their concerns to the group, either during meetings or with different occasions.
However, they are also encouraged to try to act on their own to solve the problem, in as much as their resources and competences allow: “We tried in the beginning to offer them some know-how, so that these citizens interested in doing something could make, together with their neighbors, at least few steps for solving the problem. The actual involvement of those interested is absolutely necessary for a successful implementation of any project and for the endurance of positive accomplishments.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis)

However, as most often is the case in the presence of more than one problem on the agenda, there is a need for prioritization. The hierarchy dynamics of problems are described by Delia Mihalache in the following terms: “We seek to prioritize the problems [...] taking into account particularly the number of people affected by the problem, the relevance, the gravity and the clarity of the problem, the number of people willing to get involved in solving that problem and the actual chances of those problems to get resolved [...] If we do not reach a consensus within the group over which problem should we address, then we vote."

In order to stay in touch with the citizens – who are directly affected by problems – Callatis uses a set of strategies, described by Delia Mihalache as consisting of: flyers and posters distributed to neighbors or placed on the blocks doors, the group’s online blog and the Facebook page, a brochure called “The Trumpet” with information to be used by the inhabitants of the neighborhood, and which currently reached issue no. 4, discussions with the neighborhood inhabitants, public events organized in the neighborhood. For the Istru Park they organized “Ziuă Cartierului”, an event which benefited from the participation of 105 inhabitants of the area and 6 representatives of the local authorities from District 6. The event provided for the citizens the occasion to ask the representatives of authorities specific questions. Also, it was an opportunity for the citizens to obtain the authorities’ verbal commitment regarding the taking into consideration of community-rooted proposals as far as the re-organization of the park is concerned. Furthermore, “Ziuă Cartierului” was a good occasion to consult the citizens about the plans that the Callatis Group advanced for the rearrangement of the park.

Iustina Neagu, one of CeRe’s community organizers involved in the activity of the Group offered a detailed description of this event, its purpose and most important moments. Whereas the event was first and foremost organized for the community, the moment also provided an occasion for the citizens to meet the authorities in a setting that was ideal for all parts involved to observe and reflect on the problem. Thus, apart from the activities organized for parents and children, and which benefited from a significant audience, the event also offered the opportunity to “pressure the authorities”.

As the authorities have been present at the event, the organizers included a component called ‘accountability session’: “this means having the community in a room together with decision makers and asking them very specific and closed questions like: will you replace the sand with anti-trauma material? Yes or no. This way they are compelled to answer with a Yes or No instead of a long complicated answer that does not mean anything...” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). Thus, the main rationale of such a strategy is to exert pressure on the authorities on specific, concrete issues and demands. The fact that the event started in the park was perceived as a good occasion for the authorities to see for themselves that the park needs to be rehabilitated.

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51 According to the minutes of the event (proces verbal), available on the Callatis blog. The document is signed by both representatives of Callatis and those from ADPDU – Sector 6.
The activities from the Park, where children had a very consistent input in a creative and very playful process of evaluating the state of the playground, have been followed by discussions at the district school, where the event continued. According to Iustina Neagu, the activities from the park and the authorities’ presence in the park were extremely useful for “constructing the case”. In other words, they contributed to the Group’s effort of making the decision makers understand that there is a need for rehabilitation and that their request is not without precedent. In this regard, they used photos from other parks that have been rehabilitated, so that they add weight to their demands, and provide, at the same time illustrations of the possible improvements that could apply to Istru Park. In addition, on the walls of the school space where the event continued, they placed a sketch with a proposal for the re-configuration of the park, using the technical expertise of one of the participants.

According to Iustina Neagu, “the meeting was a success, because the vice head of ADP answered ‘Yes’ to most of the questions, yes, we will replace the sand… yes, we will create the football field…”. In the aftermath of the event, they also wrote the minutes of the meeting where they included the sequence of questions and answers, in order to have them signed.

In addition to the methods mentioned above, there was a recent proposal from one citizen in terms of facilitating the communication between citizens and the group. The proposal was made in order to offer the possibility for people that lack time for attending the Group’s meetings. “There was one citizen that proposed Ms. Blaga to make a postal box of the group and place it in Istru Park, where the people from the district can come and send their identified issues that they want solved.” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

The financial support for the organization of public events and printing of materials has been provided by CeRe. CeRe plays in fact a very important role in the history and activity of Callatis. Delia Mihalache recollects the early period of the group: “We, the members, did not know each other […] each of us wanted to debate and to act together with others, but we did not know how to this and to also be effective in obtaining the proposed results. […] With the help of CeRe we had meetings and discussions with other NGOs on topics related to selective recycling, the problem of stray dogs, buildings from the patrimony etc. […] CeRe offers us legal and organizational assistance, teaches us how to have efficient meetings and how to organize public events, how to approach the authorities and even the neighbors”.

Additionally to the support mentioned above, CeRe is the actual catalyzer of the group and assists the group in all its activity. Community organizers from CeRe maintain a very close relation with Callatis group and attend all its meetings. Iustina Neagu mentioned that she keeps a very close relation with the group and organizes and attends meetings whenever it is needed: “It depends very much where they are with their campaign. Before they organized the District’s Day we met three times in a week. It depends very much on their activities. And this collaboration will go on the same way, we will try to meet weekly, to identify a problem to fight for, we should enlarge the group and attract other people from the neighborhood.”

CeRe also provides assistance in preparing the meetings and public hearings with the representatives of public authorities. For instance for the meeting with the Mayor concerning budget ratification, CeRe helped the group to prepare the questions as well as the needed information: “We prepared the group very well with all the afferent questions” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). This type of assistance continued in other situations, too.

Iustina Neagu described how CeRe together with the Callatis group met before any meetings and prepare them. They decided on the types of questions they wanted to ask, but also on the type of information they needed from the authorities: “For instance when we went in an audience to ADPDU and then when the ADPDU president came to visit the Istru Park,
Callatis is, despite its informal status, not completely isolated from the NGO sector, on the one hand through the close collaboration with CeRe, while at the same time having also established communication with other organizations, on specific problems (for example Asociația Mai Mult Verde / ‘More Green’ Association, Asociatia Vier Profen). Apart from NGOs, the activities in which Callatis got involved meant also the communication and collaboration with the local police and with school principals. Moreover, Delia Mihalache underlined the importance of establishing connections with independent experts. Their competence is required particularly for technical issues. The idea of independent experts is well received by the authorities, which complain that they are short of such resources primarily due to financial shortcomings. For addressing the Istru Park issue, Callatis used the assistance of two architects who worked in developing the concept of the park in accordance with the needs of the community and who designed the actual plan. The authorities accepted the plan and they used it for the redevelopment of the park. Lastly, the group seeks to maintain a continuous communication with the administrators of blocks, because they ensure the direct link with the citizens and their problems.

The communication with the local authorities started with letters and petitions and then continued with meetings, contacts by telephone and joint participation in the public events. This relationship was maintained through regular contacts, by either phone or in writing, ensuring thus the visibility of the group and reminding about the salience of the problem under discussion.

This type of strategy led the authorities developing an attitude described by Delia Mihalache as “toleration” towards the group. This attitude is however accompanied by an approach that may be interpreted in terms of weakness as far as Callatis is concerned: the authorities contest the representativity of the group, which may further impact on the composition of the list of relevant issues and on the way in which action is taken. “Our proposals for solving certain problems received responses like <This is your opinion; if we ask other citizens, we will receive different answers. You know, you are not the only citizens in the neighborhood, we must see what the others are saying too... >”.

In addition, in the case of the relation with ADP and the letters sent at this institution, the Group faced similar problems. During the audience with the president of ADP, he claimed having sent 4 times a response to Callatis’ request, even though that was not the case. The ADP indeed sent a response to Callatis’ request but the letter didn’t give any real response: “the response was like: we received your letter, we will consider it and we will come back with a response” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). Iustina Neagu continued by mentioning that the real response never arrived to any of the members of Callatis Group.

Another important moment in the Group’s activity and interaction with the authorities is related to the shift of focus to the budgetary issues that were certainly relevant and consequential for the resources available to affect changes in the rehabilitation of the Istru Park. This course of action raised again several difficulties. According to Iustina Neagu, the proposal for the local budget of District 6 had been published on January 19th and in its initial form this proposal did not include any specific references to Istru Park. The expectation was that the project was to be issued in February, which meant that people were taken by surprise. As a consequence they filed “a request for a debate on the budget, according to Law no. 52 and made a complaint that this project was proposed for adoption in January 31st, at the coming meeting of the Local Council. Between January 19th and January 31st there are 12
days, and according to the Law 52 the project was supposed to be on the site for 30 days before the adoption.”

The Group took part in the Local Council Meeting from January 31st and was prepared with a set of recommendations where they asked the allocation of resources for the rehabilitation of the Istru Park. The meeting was marked by difficult moments and procedural obstacles for the Group in having their set of recommendations read. In the end the councilor from PNL read the Group’s recommendations, however, the local budget had been voted in its initial form, which was a strong disappointment for the Group. The budget however was still contested by the Group, which pointed to the allocation of an unusually great amount of money for the construction of statues. They wrote a petition in which they asked for the elimination of the 3 statues from the budget, or at least for the reduction of the amounts allocated in the initial form of the budget. The initiative proved to be consequential, as the City Hall reduced the amount initially allocated for this purpose from 2,3 million Euro to less than 200,000 Euro.

The other methods in communicating and approaching the local authorities and relevant institutions are through meetings and audiences. In this sense, for instance, the Callatis Group participated in a meeting with the mayor for discussing the ratification of the budget. In this case, the mayor knew in advance that the Group would attend the meeting and address some questions concerning the Istru Park. That peculiar context left room for interpretation and the post-debate impression was that the mayor had his answers prepared in advance: “He knew we were coming there and what we wanted. He had all the answers prepared for us” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). In addition, he invited some pensioners that he had invited a night before for a dinner and told them we were there to talk about the thermic rehabilitation and that Callatis group, together with CeRe representatives are against this initiative: “...they were manipulated [...] and therefore we were contradicted and attacked by the citizens, mayor and other employees of the City Hall”. (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe)

The situation was similar with another audience, this time organized at the ADP. The president of ADP used the same strategy as the mayor and wanted to manipulate the Callatis Group. Again, the impression was that the momentary divergences of opinion within the Group created room for speculating the contextual lack of agreement. “During the audience, people started to fight against each other [...] This made the group look fragmented in his opinion and made him feel there was a weakness he could speculate.” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

Although the communication with the local authorities has been carefully cultivated through repeated contacts, the relationship of the groups with the administration was not always unproblematic. According to Delia Mihalache, the greatest difficulties in the relationship with the authorities have been “the identification of departments and persons responsible for solving a certain problem, the delay of responses required by the group, receiving incomplete or irrelevant information, the tendency of authorities to ignore our proposals on the account that they are not representative, the difficulty in finding a common voice for the group”.

This type of difficulties was also pointed in the discussion with Iustina Neagu. Specifically, the effectiveness of group action is altered in situations where, when talking to representatives of different departments of the municipality or with people placed in different hierarchical positions, each of the parts claim that it should be them in charge of the problem. Such circumstances can result in particularly confusing situations for the citizens who no
longer know whom they should approach, since each side claims to have the decision power in the issue under discussion. Moreover, such situations also point to a problem of communication between the different levels and actors of the local authorities, who fail at passing information that is, from the point of view of citizens, crucial for making progress in solving their problems.

Further problems are encountered when the parts involved attach political or ideological labels to groups. This was the case with Callatis, as they have been accused to be affiliated with PNL because in several instances they have been supported by one of the local councilors who is a member of that party. Such circumstances may again result in confusing contexts, where the Group is at risk to lose its cohesion and to reconsider its options of approaching the authorities, in the light of conflicting political interests. Iustina Neagu recollected how she tried to reassure the group that the approach they took, in advancing their demands, has been the correct one and that they should try to avoid making compromises even when they feel they are intimidated by escalating political vanities.

The features related to the group are indeed important. If at times it is difficult to find a common voice, a second challenge relevant for the relationship with the authorities and for the effectiveness of the group has to do with its actual size. The size of the group directly impacts on its representative quality. Such issues are perceived as being still the aspects which require further improvements, as far as the functioning of the group is concerned.

The fact that difficulties inevitably arise in the relationship with the authorities did not discourage the group from persisting in their efforts. Being, however, aware of the need to adapt their strategies, the group did not hesitate to improve its approach: “We overcame some of the difficulties through a better documentation on the websites of the authorities, through repeated written interventions, emails and phone calls in order to obtain the required information, through frequent discussions within the group and the clarification of the group’s position around a problem or a proposal.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis)

Indeed, the most obvious obstacles the Group had to face are related to the authorities being reluctant to cooperate and mostly to a lack of response and feedback from their side. In addition, since the relation with the authorities is done through people, another important obstacle Callatis Group had to face was the attitude of some public officials. For instance, during the audience with the president of ADP, he revealed an ostentatious, conflictual and arrogant attitude. During this meeting he got into a conflictual situation with one of the members. Therefore, during his visit in the park (2 days after the incidents) the Group decided to adjust its strategy and let only the members he got along to interact with him: “…our strategy was to appease him, to do whatever he liked, since we were so close to winning, and we let only Ms. Blaga and Mr. Dumitru talk (he seemed to like them during the audience)” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

The relationship between the group and the authorities needs to also be examined from the point of view of the wider political context in which it is circumscribed. Changing political context may attract also changes in which interactions between authorities and civic groups are shaped. In regard of Callatis’ relationship with the local authorities Delia Mihalache argued that “initially, the authorities’ attitude was neutral, learning about the existence of our group; later […] we have been labeled as <saboteurs> of the local budget and of the city hall’s projects, as well as allies of the opposition from the Local Council.”

As this study is being written, municipalities from all over Romania prepare for local elections. The campaign context provides very valuable occasions for political organizations
to seek supporters among the civically active groups, because in this way they openly target communities already crystalized around specific, concrete local problems. Callatis has been no exception in this regard. According to Delia Mihalache, both the actual locally leading party and the opposition approached the group seeking electoral support. Callatis, however, decided to remain neutral in the electoral contest. Nevertheless, after discussions within the group, they decided to ask the parties to organize real public debates centered on issues that are relevant for the communities and to “post the legislative projects on the district city hall’s website at least 30 days before the submission for voting in the Local Council, according to the Law of Transparency of Decisions.” (Delia Mihalache, Callatis).

V. THE RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Although this study focuses on the specific intervention of Callatis around the remediation of the Istru Park, the group’s activity is not limited to this particular action and the additional accomplishments should be mentioned. Such achievements provide a more accurate illustration of how a handful of motivated citizens, succeeded, with assistance from CeRe and the affiliated community organizers, to draw local authorities’ attention and affect positive changes in their community.

Chronologically, as indicated by Delia Mihalache, the first success came in the aftermath of the initiative to clean and rebuild the alley between the schools. The alley has been properly remade, with asphalt, which previously lacked, making walking difficult in rainy weather. The measure has been implemented about 6 months after the Group filed the petition at the city hall of district 6.

The accomplishment with the Istru Park was the second success of Callatis. As in the case of the school alley, it also took around 6 months from contacting the authorities until the problem had been solved: “We allocated the Istru Park project 290000 RON and we will start the works on 1st of April” (ADP President cited by Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). Indeed, the outcome of the Istru issue initiated by Callatis Group was a positive one, since the works have already started and moreover the plan for rehabilitation followed closely the Group’s proposals.

The group has however an additional reason to be confident in its ability to influence local decisions. In a joint action with another civic group called “Initiativa Favorit”, Callatis succeeded to push for a modification of the budget, specifically the reduction of the funds allocated for building statues in the neighborhood from 2,300,000 Euro to 854,000 Euro, and subsequently even below 200,000 Euro. When thinking in terms of outcomes and results, necessary references need to be made to the ultimate beneficiaries of the solutions – the citizens from the neighborhood for which Callatis seeks to act as a voice and interface in the relationship with the authorities.

As mentioned in an earlier section, Callatis was formed with the help of CeRe, within a community organizing project. Prior to the actual formation of the group, according to Delia Mihalache, around 200 persons had been interviewed about the problems from their neighborhood, of which 12 took part in the first meeting. In time, except for the 8-10 members that currently represent the actual group, there were also some sporadic participation of neighbors, occasioned by specific problems encountered by them, personally, or that the block was confronted with.
In terms of the impact on the community the Group represents, it is difficult to assess it since it is a fairly new form of civic initiative with a short period of activity (less than 2 years). In order to understand this impact, the community organizer that worked closely with the Group was interviewed. In this sense, Iustina Neagu declared that: “There is no clear impact. Unfortunately, this is a new exercise that people don’t know much about. The people cannot internalize the idea that there is a group within the district that can represent them in relation with the authorities. The people cannot internalize that they can go along with the group to fight together. They cannot internalize that they can actually hold authorities accountable…” To conclude, the community is not ready to understand and use the benefits of such a group.

Therefore, besides the small number of members within the Callatis Group, the community is rather reluctant and non-participative. This fact is again acknowledged by Iustina Neagu from CeRe: “on the action side there is a rupture between the group and the community, in the sense that the community is not coming towards the group to express their issues, but the community always sustains the group when they need signatures or during some events”.

Another important aspect related to the impact on the community is that related to the fact that most of the citizens are not aware of the fact that the works in Istru Park started due to the Callatis Group’ actions: “…the biggest problem is that most of the people do not know that the park is being renovated as a consequence of all the intercessions done by the group and that the majority of these people think it is a City Hall’s initiative” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe). This is a very important aspect since it weakens the chances for other citizens to join the Callatis Group.

A positive change was however pointed at, in terms of a change in the general attitude of citizens who “became more confident that their opinion matters, that their signature on a petition truly helps to solve a problem”. Moreover, two additional aspects have to be underlined. The time required for solving the problem is shorter when the problems are addressed through collective action, compared to the alternative of relying solely on individual, un-coordinated efforts. Delia Mihalache underlined, however, the greatest challenge that the group is facing in terms of relationship with the citizen it speaks for relates to the latters’ mobilization: “to convince the people to concretely get involved in solving the problems they are confronted with as a community and to agree on the most appropriate solutions”.

In addition to the impact the Callatis Group has on the community it represents, it is also important to assess its impact on the authorities with which it interacts. In this respect, one needs to mention that the Group managed to bring on the agenda an issue that the authorities didn’t consider important: the rehabilitation of Istru Park. Moreover, not only did the authorities accept to address this issue, but took into consideration most of the proposals coming from the Callatis Group. One possible explanation is that the proposals were indeed backed by professionals that the authorities did not need to pay. Although the authorities accepted and implemented the proposal coming from the Callatis Group, the process as described in previous sections was not easy. The Group had to face reluctance and rejection from the authorities.

Nevertheless, in time the authorities changed their ways of relating and approaching the group. In the beginning, as Iustina Neagu mentioned, the Callatis Group together with all the other Citizens’ Initiative Groups were very well received and accepted by the representatives of authorities: “…everybody was fascinated, all the councilors were asking the Groups to
interfere in the discussions and meetings”. After some time, when the Groups started to be very active and address them in several situations, their attitude changed. The authorities became rather reluctant, distrustful and mostly conflictual with the Citizens’ Initiative Groups: “...they don’t receive them with open arms anymore” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).

This attitude coming from authorities can be interpreted in both ways: as a negative sign but in the same time as a positive one, since they consider the Groups real challengers. To sustain the last statement, it is also important to mention the fact that in the recent local elections several parties addressed the Callatis Group in order to obtain their support in the campaign. Consequently, the authorities and politicians started to acknowledge the power and influence these groups have in their communities: “when they are afraid of the Groups it means they finally take them seriously” (Iustina Neagu, community organizer CeRe).
Concluding remarks

The objective of this research was to assess the democratic potential of various forms of public participation using a framework of evaluation based on the following dimensions: issue, actors, context, process, and outcomes. In terms of the issue, our assessment demonstrated that the issues tackled by the selected cases of public participation are very different from one another depending on: complexity, content, amplitude of the affected public, necessary resources and the extent of disagreement between stakeholders’ standpoints. In this sense, our study discussed two instances of issues that are specific and for which it is rather easy to identify the relevant decision-makers (in the case of the CCCs from Timișoara and Callatis Group in Bucharest) while the third case (GLOC from Cluj-Napoca) provides an illustration of a complex issue which calls to be addressed at different levels and by multiple types of actors. The specific issues referred to: streets and parks’ rehabilitation, renovation of historical buildings, modernization of public town pipes or the safety in parks. On the other hand, the illustration of the more complex and multidimensional issue referred to the relocation of Roma families to the Cluj-Napca’s garbage dump, which is part of a wider problem of inclusive housing policies of vulnerable groups.

Our assessment in terms of the actors involved, once more reveals variation among the selected cases, based on the origin, composition and organizational features. We discussed in our analysis different types of civic entities, starting from citizens’ groups initiated and supported by the local authorities – the CCCs from Timișoara - and citizens’ groups resulting from community organizing interventions – Callatis Group from Bucharest. The remaining entity included in the analysis is an informal coalition of NGOs and affiliated individual members. Another identified difference was revealed by the purpose these entities have.

For instance, on one side there were the citizens’ groups in Timișoara and Callatis created to assist the local decision-making processes, while on the other hand there was GLOC that was initiated as a reaction to a local authority’s decision, but that clearly stated its willingness to collaborate with the municipality. Apart from the revealed differences, the selected cases display common traits. In all the discussed cases, the decision-makers are represented by the local authorities. Furthermore, none of the civic entities has autonomous legal status. Still, this cannot be interpreted exclusively as an advantage or disadvantage, because their informal nature can be beneficial or detrimental depending on the context.

The dimension of context is the one where we most easily can identify differences between the three cases. In order to clearly reveal these differences, the most important thing that defines the context is the relevance and amplitude of the issues approached. Consequently, the higher the complexity and amplitude of the issues addressed, the more diverse the levels and actors involved and therefore these can either favor or constrain the civic actions. In the case of the CCCs from Timișoara, since they were created by the local authorities to assist them on a current basis in the decision-making processes, there is a limited range of actors involved: local authorities, CCCs, FALT and other occasional partners, which facilitates a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

Further on, in GLOC’s case due to the higher relevance and complexity of the issue, there is a greater variety of stakeholders involved, with different expertise, influence and decision-making power: public authorities (City Hall, Local Council, County Council, The National Council Against Discrimination, North West Regional Development Agency), local NGOs (by virtue of GLOC’s extensive networking in the non-governmental sector) and
international organizations (UNDP, Amnesty International, European Commission and European Roma Rights’ Center). This wide range of actors might prolong the process of finding solutions acceptable for the many parts involved; however, it may also have positive effects through putting pressure on the authorities.

In our last illustration, the once more specific and small-scale issue determines a narrow range of actors involved: Callatis Group, local authorities and CeRe. Even if one might find similarities with the Timişoara case, the origin of the civic entity cannot be overlooked. Whereas the CCCs have been created by the municipality, thus increasing the likelihood of collaboration, Callatis was actually a result of a community organizing initiative and therefore it was reasonable to expect less collaboration.

In terms of process, Romania has the channels needed for intervening in the policy-making process (Law 544/2001, Law 52/2003), thus the prerequisites for public participation are available. There are, however, differences between the strategies and methods used in order to approach the authorities and to support the cause in the community. In terms of the strategies used to address the authorities, in all the three illustrations there was a common set of methods: petitions, letters, joint meetings and invitations to public debates. An important aspect was envisaged, the importance of establishing personal ties between civic activists/citizens and the civil servants.

However, such ties are not consequential unless they are backed with the power of decision or institutional support. In terms of perception, we found a certain agreement that cooperation with authorities is beneficial for problem-solving. Even if initially some of these groups might make use of conflictual means (protests, street marches), in the end the ultimate goal is to arrive to cooperation. On the other hand, in terms of seeking support for their cause in the wider community, the most frequently used methods are through public debates and events or cultural actions and performances.

Regarding the outcomes, their dependency on the types of issues addressed and the relations developed with the authorities was revealed in all the three discussed illustrations. In this regard, when there is higher proximity and enduring collaboration between the stakeholders and the problems are specific and punctual, there are higher chances for those problems to be actually solved. For instance, in both the Timişoara and Bucharest cases, the issues are comparatively more specific and the actions to be pursued are more obvious than in Cluj. However, even between the two similar cases one might encounter differences based mostly on the enduring collaboration with the authorities. Consequently, due to a lasting collaboration with the authorities the CCCs gained significant influence in that they are involved in budgetary planning. In the case of GLOC, the outcome is not the actual solving of the problem but making important steps towards its solving. In this sense, GLOC contributed to the authorities having a more articulate strategy in tackling the issue as their relationship with the authorities evolved from poor communication to being partners in a pilot project that addresses the locative situation of vulnerable groups.

The findings discussed in this research support the idea that neither the contentious nor the collaborative approaches to public participation are universal solutions for effective civic influence in decision-making processes. At the same time, one cannot argue that any of these two approaches are democratic or undemocratic; rather they can be more or less democratic along the dimensions that participation involves. Additionally, the three illustrations revealed that the types of strategies employed by stakeholders in approaching authorities and in the interactions developed throughout the process are determined by the complexity, scale and relevance of the issue addressed.
Poland
Introduction

Although Polish democracy is only a little over twenty years old, it has already suffered from symptoms affecting more mature systems. In Poland, the phenomenon known as crisis of representative democracy has manifested itself primarily in decreasing trust towards public institutions of the central as well as local level. People trust politicians and their decisions less and less, while their interest in politics is declining.

Research show that over two thirds of Poles (70%) assess their interest in national politics as little, and almost as big a share (60%) does it with respect to local politics. The scant interest is accompanied by the ever more widespread pessimistic vision of one's own meagre influence on what is going on locally and nationally. Among the most efficient ways of influencing politics BEKS’s respondents named primarily participation in elections and referenda, national (36%) and local (30%). Their understanding of how citizens may impact politics turned out limited to few well-established political institutions and mechanisms. Most respondents considered public administrators best representatives of their interest: commune administrator/mayor (33%), members of city/town/commune council (24%). Such responses may reflect not only the “traditional,” narrow understanding of democratic system, but also little knowledge about other mechanisms of public decision-making.

Other potential representatives of citizens’ interests may be non-governmental organizations. Since its rebirth in 1989, the third sector has developed and grown robust. Currently, over 107 thousand NGOs operate in Poland, out of which 30% work on the local level. At the same time, recognition of the organizations among “common” Poles is very low: according to BEKS, 42% of Poles do not know whether there are any NGOs operating in their local community. According to 67% of respondents, NGOs have little influence on what is going on in their city, town or village. Nonetheless, as the report Condition of the Third Sector shows, over half of the adult population (56%) thinks that NGOs help solve social problems more efficiently than state institutions. Among those Poles who have some knowledge about NGOs and their activities, the organizations are perceived as experts in their narrow fields (such as providing help for certain disadvantaged groups), but not as efficient participants in the dialogue with local authorities. Moreover, Poles seldom identify the third sector organizations with representatives of citizens’ interest – according to BEKS just 3% of Poles think NGOs represent their interests.

Context

For a long time in Poland ‘participation’ connoted few traditional democratic mechanisms, such as elections. This way of thinking, which reduced democracy to electing people’s representatives (i.e. members of the parliament, village, town or city councilors and administrators) supposed to take full responsibility for governing, dominated the popular discourse of the first two decades after the political-economic transformation, when Polish
democracy was ripening into a stable system. As Benjamin Barber argued, sticking to such a view of the democratic system is, to a degree, rational as it allows citizens to avoid the feeling of insecurity and responsibility connected to direct involvement in decision making about public matters. 55

Similarly, many supporters of policies of strengthening civic participation reduced them to activities aimed at increasing voter turnout. Only in recent years has the concept of civil participation acquired a broader meaning in the public discourse and found first applications in local community management (also applications meeting the criteria of higher rungs of the participation ladder described by Sherry Arnstein) 56. Most initiatives are launched in cities, and most are undertaken by grass-root local organizations or groups of activists. Many local authorities or public institutions are still hesitant about initiating such actions, but they engage in participation projects, often externally financed, in partnership with NGOs slightly more frequently.

It is the civic party, i.e. NGOs and loosely organized social activists, who initiate actions fostering broader participation and deliberation in Poland. Activists engaged in such processes name among their main motivations: failures of existent governing structures, the belief that participation is beneficial, and - remarkably - the “right” of all citizens to be the part of public decision making (attitude that is perhaps best illustrated with Lefebvre’s slogan “the right to the city” often used by the so called urban movements).

Curiously enough, the pleas for wider participation have unexpectedly found better resonance due to the recent financial crisis: while local authorities are forced to introduce budget cuts, the idea of inclusion of citizens in decision making about public spending may gain their support as a rationalization mechanism. The risk of loading the burden of responsibility for unpopular decisions on the backs of citizens materialized clearly when the authorities of Poznan tried to use deliberative polling to decide on budget cuts in 2013.

**Legal framework on national level**

Polish Constitution does not regulate public consultations or other forms of participatory actions specifically. However, articles concerning the right to information (art. 61 and art.74), social dialogue (art. 20 indicates the need for social dialogue and cooperation with social partners but refers only to economic system), tools for evaluation of state institutions (art. 63 mentions petitions, motions, proposals and complaints made in public interest) relate to matters crucial for participation 57. The Constitution gives citizens the right to create laws specifying regulations and conditions for civil legislative initiative (art. 118 section 2). The procedure allows for drafting a legislative act which then, if fulfills the requirements including a written declaration of support by 100,000 citizens, is discussed and voted on by the Parliament. It is also possible for citizens to express a legally binding opinion through a referendum (the referendum is ordered by the Sejm - the lower house of the Polish Parliament.

57 It is worth mentioning that the Constitution does not refer specifically to participation of citizens in decision processes concerning their interest. The articles cited point only to the right to information and methods of direct influence on or evaluation of public institutions which, however, do not guarantee that the opinions or postulates will in any way be legally binding.
or following a motion by a group of at least 500,000 citizens). Referenda can also be organized on the local level if at least 10% of voters in a local community or 5% of voters in a region submit a referendum motion.

The Act on the so called public benefit organizations (OPP) and voluntary work passed on 24th April 2003 relates to the participation issues more directly. The Act regulates cooperation between state institutions (on both levels, national and local) and non-governmental organizations, including OPP. In particular, the cooperation can take the form of consultation of legislative acts, for instance those concerning statutory activities of organizations, or the creation of advisory or initiative teams composed of representatives of state institutions as well as members of NGOs.

Another document worth mentioning because of its facilitating influence on public participation in Poland is the Aarhus Convention passed by the EU Parliament. The document contains regulations requiring that the public takes part in working out and accepting plans, programmes and principles of strategies concerning vital issues, and in drafting executive regulations or establishing procedures for the already binding legislative norms.

Following other acts regulating specific realms of state administration, commissions and councils are established (e.g. Board of Education, National Disability Council, National Council for Management Water) whose tasks include issuing opinions on regulations governing each realm. This could be considered a good practice, an institutionalized way of engaging the ruled in the ruling, in most cases, however, the acts do not establish consultation of decisions and draft laws with the councils as mandatory; nor do they specify the procedure.

**Legal framework on local levels**

Legal framework for public consultations on local levels is furnished by three legislative acts concerning territorial governments58. The acts specify that public consultations can be organized within a territorial unit in order to deliberate matters enumerated by the relevant act and other matters important for the gmina/powiat/voivodeship; and that consultation rules and procedures are specified by the local council. Situations in which public consultations are mandatory include:

- creation, merging, separation or abolition of gmina units and establishing their borders;
- conferring upon a gmina the status of the town and establishing its borders;
- establishing or changing names of gminas or the seats of their authorities;
- drafting of local urban development plans;
- formulation of development strategies by voivodeships.

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59 Gmina, powiat and voivodeship are units of the three-level territorial administration in Poland, ordered from the smallest and most grassroot to the biggest and most complex territorial subdivisions; their closest English referents are, respectively: municipality, county and province. Currently, Poland has 16 voivodeships, 379 powiats and nearly 2500 gminas.
Although the regulations, which could be interpreted as opening government practices to citizens’ opinions and participation, are found in legal documents of different rank and purpose, they seldom directly obligate authorities to include citizens in decision-making. Moreover, even in those rare cases, consultation procedures remain unspecified. The only exception to the rule is the process of drafting plans and documents determining urban development of an administrative area. However, the positive interpretation of law embedded in Polish political culture (“we do just what the law tells us to” and not “we can do more than the law specifies”) turns the minimum required by law into a maximum of what is usually put into practice.

From that perspective, the legal framework for public participation in Poland asks for the amendment of specific regulations determining the way in which public consultations should be conducted on each stage. Several attempts to amend the existing law have been made including the Presidential initiative aiming at creation of a legal act facilitating participation of inhabitants in activities of local governments, whose draft was consulted and discussed in 2011 and in 2012. Unfortunately, some of the proposed regulations met with strong opposition from the side of the local administration and, eventually, the act has not been voted on in the Sejm. Apart from making the legislative efforts, supporters of participation have for years been lobbying for working out solutions that could help establish standards of good consultations and order through this form of civic dialogue.

Although Polish law does not refer to civic participation directly, it gives citizens two instruments which allow them to exercise actual influence on public matters in their local communities. The instruments, which may be considered the “customary” tools for local participation, are: Solecki fund and local initiative.

Solecki fund, established by the Solecki Fund Act on 20th February 2009, grants inhabitants of village gminas a right to partly determine the structure of budget spending of the community. The act allows the communities to provision funds for each of the auxiliary subdivisions of gminas called solectwo. Inhabitants of the latter decide on how the money will be spent during a village meeting, which is the most direct democratic mechanism in the Polish political system. The decision made during such a meeting is binding for wojt, the leader of the whole gmina, and becomes a part of the gmina’s budget act.

What is worth mentioning, the Solecki Fund Act allows village gminas to provision such funds without requiring them to do so; it is, therefore, a mechanism that creates favourable conditions for participation, and not legally enforces them. It is the Gmina’s Council to decide upon the provision – the council passes a provision for a given year by 31th of March the year before. When the Council decide not to assignate funds for solectwos, they have to issue such a decision as well – it means that every year in every village gmina composed of solectwos a chance arises for the local community to discuss whether the funds are needed and, if so, how to create and distribute them. Every solectwo in a gmina is assigned a determined amount of money depending on the number of inhabitants and the gmina’s income following an algorithm described by the Solecki Fund Act. Gmina Council can also pass a decision to increase the funds from its budget.

The funds may be spent on activities fulfilling three conditions: serving improvement of living conditions in the gmina, belonging to the statutory tasks of the gmina, being in accordance with the gmina’s development strategy. Inhabitant’s decision on how to spend the fund, established during village meeting which is solectwo’s legislative body, is then communicated to wojt in the form of a fund application by 30th September. What may be a significant incentive to use this mechanism is that a gmina that has created and adequately
spent a solemn two fund can enjoy a partial - 10, 20 or 30% - reimbursement of the expenses from state budget.

**Local initiative** is a mechanism introduced by the Public Benefit Organizations Act (OPP Act) of 2010 (art. 2 point 4). The initiative provides a legal form in which local administration can realize its task in cooperation with citizens. Inhabitants who decide that an investment or an action is needed in their gmina can file a motion to the executive branch of the local government (motions can be submitted by a non-formalized group as well as through a local NGO). The range of activities that can be realized using the local initiative is specified by article 19b of the Act, and includes: construction, reconstruction and renovation of infrastructure, activities aiming at preserving cultural heritage, education initiatives, organization of voluntary actions and work. Significantly, through filing the local initiative motion the inhabitants not only inform the authorities about their idea, but also bind themselves to cooperate on its realization since the motion works also as a contract between the submitter and the authorities. The cooperation may consist in voluntary work, financial or material support.

The realization of a local initiative does not have to require financing from the community's budget – the support can be limited to material or organizational matters. Local government can also decide to support an initiative financially, in which case the dedicated funds are disbursed directly by the executive branch.

Another mechanism, so far rarely employed, is the civic legislative initiative on local level, a right of gmina's citizens to propose legislative projects to the local government. The mechanism is grounded in the local law which "gives the right but does not require" to employ it; the specific rules and procedures of its implementation are laid out by gminas. At the turn of 2011, local legislative initiative was described in statutes of only 46.7% Polish local administration units and was employed during the last 12 months only in 10% of them.

**The Current Situation**

Local authorities in Poland employ the mechanism of public consultations most often of all participation mechanisms; consultations are in some situations required by law and, therefore, are already relatively well assimilated in the Polish administrative culture. Nevertheless, administrators tend to treat them as a painstaking obligatory requirement rather than a chance to get in touch with inhabitants. The thesis is evidenced by BEKS research, conducted among the organizers and potential participants of public consultations. The reason for organizing consultations most often indicated by administrators was the “legal obligation”.

This attitude, unlike a more positive disposition towards consultations as a means of community building, often results in only a seeming political participation of the public whose opinions are not taken into account in actual decision making. The results show that the quality of consultations is often low, too little time is allowed for the process of information or its conclusion is missing. Another problem is the way in which documents to be consulted, such as strategies or urban development plans, are presented to participants. Usually, the public has access to the documents and can file proposed changes or protests at the local office or using the local government’s website. However, any personal guidance or materials that could help understand the technical language of most documents is missing.

Public consultations fail as too passive or break for many reasons. One of them is, surely, the aforementioned lack of standards regulating the process. In response to the need for clear standards, which could also help organizers understand the deeper sense of
consultations, at the beginning of 2012 the Ministry of Administration and Digitalization launched a series of workshops with experts aiming at the creation of a Consultations’ Code regulating the process on the central level. The document was drafted and published in the summer, and is currently to become a part of the “Better Rules” programme (whose aim is to provide organizational and systemic solutions for better legislation) and to be introduced for a trial by ministries.

A careful observer of participation processes in Poland is bound to notice that some policy areas are more often consulted than others. Public space belongs to the most popular ones. Matters most often deliberated within this area are: revitalisation, changes to visual and functional aspects of public space, new public roads and transport solutions. Often, interactive tools are put to use during the consultations to make the exchange easier and present the used documents (such as maps, models, simulations) more clearly. Other areas, which have been more and more often a subject of public discussion, are strategic documents and ecology.

During the last year, participatory budgeting seems to have become a fashion. After the pioneering initiative of 2011 which engaged citizens of Sopot in planning their local budget, in 2012 similar projects were finalized in Poznan and Elblag. Plock has already launched the process, and several other local governments are working on establishing the necessary procedures in order to start budget deliberations in 2014. However, the processes are often lacking in adequate planning or slightly missing the guiding idea behind the participatory budget mechanism: in each case voting is emphasized as the vital component of the process while deliberation is neglected. In the Polish model of participatory budgeting meeting the standards of deliberation are still waiting to come into being.

Many of the participation processes in the aforementioned areas are grassroots initiatives. The reason for that is not only the inclination of NGOs to “experiment,” but also certain accessibility of funding in the form of grants competitively awarded for projects promoting or supporting participation. Apart from the inclusion of inhabitants in decision-making, working out model forms of dialogue or testing innovative methods of deliberation, participation projects aim often at training administrators and local activists. The most important sourcing of financing of participation processes in Poland are: Swiss Block Fund of the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme, Stefan Batory Foundation’s grant programme “Democracy in Action,” Fundusz Inicjatyw Obywatelskich (Civic Initiatives Fund), Norway Grants and Operation Programme “Human Capital” financed by the European Union as a part of European Social Fund.

It is, nevertheless, beyond any doubt that more and more local governments realize the importance of participation processes. Consulting local legal documents is becoming a standard and administrators rather than “if?” ask “how?” to organize public consultations. Units specialized in the participation or social communication problems are created, as well as online platforms serving inhabitants to learn about or take part in participation initiatives in their community are launched.

60 For example the Center for Social Communication in Warsaw, the Department of Social Communication and Information in Torun, the Local Initiatives and Public Consultations Office in Czestochowa.
The number of villages, towns and cities where local authorities themselves initiate consultations is growing. Administrators increasingly often decide to finance the consultations from their own budget or apply for external financing; more and more of them seek knowledge on the subject and try to work out standards for the procedure in their local community. Remarkable examples in that respect are:

- Warsaw which realized a big project financed from Norway Grants, within which District Public Consultation Coordinators were appointed and an online consultation platform was launched;
- Gdynia where a number of deliberation processes have been launched, including consultations with senior citizens about the Care Services Quality Charter, and the first Polish civic panel;
- Dabrowa Gornicza and Lodz where local authorities launched structured participatory budgeting programs.

This short introduction provides the necessary context for three examples of processes aiming at engaging citizens in decision making which we subsequently present. The first one is participatory budgeting of Sopot in 2011, when the town’s citizens were invited to discuss and decide about their community’s investment budget. The second example is on the consultations organized by the Bureau of Local Initiatives and Public Consultations by the City Hall of Czestochowa during which citizens expressed their opinions and proposed regulations concerning cycling on one of the main avenues of the city. The aim of the third project was to work out a revitalization program for the Nikiszowiec district of Katowice in cooperation with the City Hall, local NGOs and district’s inhabitants.
Case Study No. 1

Participatory Budgeting in Sopot

The process presented in this document pertains to the creation of mechanisms for the Sopot residents to co-decide on spending public funds for investment purposes. The chosen course of action was to develop and implement the method of participatory budgeting, based on the idea developed in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1989 and used since then in many countries worldwide. It was the first Polish attempt of implementing this type of mechanism city-wide.

There is no obligation in the Polish law to consult on the municipal budget with the residents – decisions on such consultations and their forms are made by the authorities of the individual municipalities. There are also no legal acts which regulate the issue of working on the local budgets in the participatory way.

The following description was based primarily on a series of interviews with the individuals involved in the process in question: Mr Marcin Gerwin and Ms Maja Grabkowska - founders and activists of the Sopot Development Initiative; Mr Marcin Skierawski, Assistant Mayor of Sopot for Metropolitan and Local Government Relations; Mr Bartosz Pietrusiński, Vice-Mayor of Sopot. Other sources of information that were analysed were articles from local press and Internet portals, as well as Internet forums entries and comments under posts published on the SDI blog.

I. THE ACTORS

The idea to implement the participatory budgeting in Sopot was a grassroots social initiative. It was initiated and promoted by the leaders of the Sopot Development Initiative (SDI) – an informal group of Sopot residents created in 2008 to seek ways of satisfying the sustainable development demands and working towards increased participation of the residents in the decision making processes in the city. Their actions were motivated by the idea that people should be able to decide about the public money and be able to spend them on the projects that they considered as actually needed.

Sopot Development Initiative (pl. Sopocka Inicjatywa Rozwojowa) is an informal group of Sopot residents interested in creating opportunities for the citizens to co-decide at the local level about public matters, as well as in introducing the perspective of sustainable development into local residents’ and politicians’ thinking about their city. Its members are active in promoting various tools of deliberation and participation at the local level, such as participatory budgeting, public consultations and local legislative initiative. The SDI leaders, Marcin Gerwin and Maja Grabkowska, blogged systematically about their initiatives and about interesting undertakings in the area of deliberative democracy in Poland and worldwide.

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Key actors in the process were the representatives of the Sopot local government authorities – members of the Sopot City Council, which, according to the Polish Local Government Act is a constitutive authority of the municipality responsible for adopting the budget, and the mayor, who is an executive body. It is worth to add that in Sopot the position of the mayor - thanks to his personal attributes and informal influence on the councilors - is exceptionally strong; hence he often gets a casting vote on various kinds of decisions concerning city management issues. On behalf of the mayor and the City Hall the whole process was coordinated by the Assistant Mayor of Sopot for Metropolitan and Local Government Relations.

II. THE CONTEXT

The postulate to introduce participatory budgeting was part of a wider range of activities of the Sopot Development Initiative for the engagement of the local resident in the city’s issues – it was part of the campaign “Democracy is more than just elections” run in cooperation with the non-governmental organisations from the neighbouring city of Gdansk. Participatory budgeting was a third step in this project, preceded by the activities which led to the implementation of the local legislative initiative of the Sopot residents and work on the development of the urban public consultations regulations. The idea that was presented to the city by the SDI activists was the participatory budgeting, where resident could initially decide on spending of the fairly small amount of the money, representing less than 1% of the total spending from the city budget. It was considered a “safe” amount for the education about the mechanisms of participatory budgeting, but at the same time sufficient to fund several smaller projects.

What is very important is that it was the members of the SDI, so effectively the residents themselves, who came up with the proposal and ideas for the process to the city authorities and spent a lot of time presenting the concept and trying to convince the council members and the mayor to support it. Initially, the authorities were against this idea – so the SDI members decided to take advantage of the upcoming local elections in November 2010. Key factor in the success of the process was a change in the composition of the City Council. Among the new members of the council, there were a few people who got engaged in the project i.e. had been spending long hours on meetings with SDI representatives, discussing possible ways of

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63 Local legislative initiative is a prerogative of the residents of Sopot, guaranteed under article 13 of the Rules of the Sopot City Council which is a part of the City Charter. It allows them to put forward civic proposals of resolutions to the City Council. The proposals should concern matters that fall into competence of the council and have to be supported by at least 200 residents. They are discussed and processed by the council and finally put to vote by the councilors.
project implementation. The support for the idea came mainly from new councilors representing oppositional groups in the council.

III. THE PROCESS

Members of the Sopot Development Initiative approached subject with an extensive knowledge on the matter – they gathered a lot of information on participatory budgeting from around the world, they knew about various approaches to the issue, ways of presenting the ideas, voting etc. A lot of time was spent on elaborating the proposal for solving organizational issues of the process in Sopot (i.e. ways of submitting ideas and rules for voting on implementation of chosen projects), which during the work on the matter were presented and discussed with the councilors. From the beginning, members of the SDI tried to engage as many city residents as possible – to achieve this they organized their own campaign for education and information on the issue, including numerous posts on their blog and meetings in the popular coffee shop Bookarnia.

Resolution on introducing the participatory budgeting in Sopot was adopted by vote by the councilors during the Sopot City Council session on 6th of May 2011. It stated that participatory budgeting will apply to less than 1% of total expenses of the city budget, which came to about 3 million PLN. Moreover, the Council decided to appoint an ad hoc City Council Commission for participatory budgeting in Sopot, responsible for establishing procedures for submitting investment ideas and voting, verification of the projects submitted by residents and the promotion of participatory budgeting to the city residents.

The issue of participatory budgeting has been discussed during City Council sessions on several occasions. Some of the councilors had a lot of doubts about the idea, pointing out that with the election they were granted a mandate to make the decisions “on behalf” of the residents, who should not be expected to be further engaged in the public affairs. The originators of the projects were in opposition, referring to the need of complementing the roles of the councilors by paying more attention to public opinion and social preferences, as well as creating a space for a discussion and making real life decisions on the issues of key expenses for the residents themselves.

Initially, the mayor was against the idea of introducing participatory budgeting, arguing that residents should have the chance to participate in the assessment of the whole city budget, not just 1% of it. However, it turned out that what the mayor meant was the traditional budgetary consultation, whose main flaw was, from the residents’ point of view and their actual impact on the decisions, that they had no binding power. From the beginning, he was also opposing the idea of using the format of a large, one day meeting – the Residents Forum (proposed initially by the SDI), during which project suggestions could be widely presented, discussed and voted out; the format practiced in various foreign municipalities with participatory budgeting.

64 Posts introducing the idea of participatory budgeting appeared on the SDI blog already at the end of 2009. When the participatory budgeting procedure was initiated by the city council, the SDI members commented systematically on it on their blog. A few meetings introducing the idea and specific SDI proposals for the format to be used in Sopot took place since March until June 2011.
Individually discussed was the issue of voting regulations over the residents’ projects: how to formally proceed with them and how to deal with the situation when the residents from one part of the city vote on the projects taking place in other parts of the city. On this occasion, the importance of the discussion preceding the vote, organized for the residents to be able to familiarize themselves with the arguments for and against implementation of certain projects and exchange ideas about them was highlighted. Another big challenge for the animators of the process was to encourage the residents to participate in the vote - not only to “push” for the projects in their area, but also to choose them for the sake of the common good of the whole community of Sopot.

The Ad Hoc City Council Commission for the participatory budgeting deliberated in the period from June until November 2011 (meetings were held even few times a week, including holidays). Members of the Commission met up on various occasions with the representatives of the Sopot Development Initiative, who participated in the work of the Commission and presented procedural solutions for the participatory budgeting, in their opinion best suited to the Sopot realities. As a result of many long discussions the Commission established primary regulations on conducting the process in accordance with the participatory budgeting methodology practiced in the West, including a rank voting, obligatory inclusion of the cost proposals and meetings of the Residents Forum, where in a wide circle they could discuss submitted project proposals.

Specially delegated plenipotentiary of the mayor regularly participated in the Commission’s meetings, opposing many of the solutions presented by the councilors and pushing for the regulations favourable to the mayor. A radical shift took place during one of the meetings of the Commission in August 2011, when the absence of the two of the councilors change the balance of power among its members. It led to a vote on the withdrawal of previous agreements and on adopting the rules of the process submitted by the mayor side, including the removal of the obligatory cost proposal and justifications as the project’s attachments, voting without ranks and lack of the Residents Forum.

The original SDI proposal for the participatory budgeting process in Sopot was very much modeled after the Brazilian solutions – it envisaged opportunities for discussing the proposals, scrutinizing them by residents on public forums. From the very beginning, the process of designing the mechanisms for budget preparation was focused on the “cool criteria” of the chosen activities – SDI activists wanted to use formats which people would find attractive and which would encourage engagement and leave space for creativity, not only handing in proposal forms, but also organizing Residents Forums – big public meetings organized for each district, where neighbors could meet and have a chance to talk about their ideas and prepare shared proposals, bringing together city residents. The final format of the process was a compromise between those ideas and the reality of the City Hall and the mayor’s and councilors doubts about introducing such a new (and perceived as “radical”) mechanism of involving residents in decisions about public spending.

It eventually consisted of:

- informational campaign (including issuing informational materials and 12 public meetings during which the draft of the budget plan was presented);
- 2,5 months period for the residents to propose investment projects (from August 30th until October 14th);
- 2 weeks time during which civil servants from the City Hall and councilors from the Commission for participatory budgeting verified the submitted proposals;
public vote (from November 2\textsuperscript{nd} until November 7\textsuperscript{th});
\item mayor putting forward the results of the vote to the City Council;
\item City Council passing a resolution accepting the budget plans.

The City Hall website was used to inform Sopot residents about the process’ activities, announcements in the local press and radio were made, as well as in the city newsletter. Posters were distributed and placed on the city poles and some of the apartment blocks managed by the housing cooperatives. One of the key communication channels was the free delivery of the leaflets distributed by the Polish Mail directly to the households in Sopot, initiated by the City Hall – firstly with the information about the process and project submission form, and then the second time – with the voting card and information about the consultation meetings. Surprisingly, the campaign was focused on the message about consulting the budget – the authorities did not emphasize the element of participatory budgeting as a separate and innovative method.

On 30\textsuperscript{th} of August 2011, Sopot residents were invited to submit their project proposals. The submissions were opened until 14\textsuperscript{th} of October and could be made on the special forms delivered by the Polish Mail directly to the mailboxes and available for collection in the City Hall. There were no subject matter nor budget restrictions for the proposals – ideas from all fields were welcomed, without any cost limits; however, mostly projects related to small infrastructural investments and renovations were submitted. Together, over 500 proposals and suggestions for the 2012 budget were received, submitted by about 200 residents. Next, they were verified for possible implementation by the officials from the relevant departments of the City Hall, who also prepared the cost estimates for each of the projects.

In theory, projects were supposed to be checked only formally and could not be rejected because of personal preferences of the officials or councilors. However, as public observers of the process have noted, there were some irregularities in this area, partially due to the lack of detailed regulations of the submission procedures. As a result of the lack of cost estimates or even some more detailed descriptions of the submitted proposals, the officials often had problems with the correct valuation which then led to rejection of some of the projects. The officials also interfered with the projects proposals and quite authoritatively decided about (not) approving individual projects for the vote, mostly arguing that some of the projects were irrational and claiming personal expertise in all of the subject matters (in this respect their behaviour strongly distorted the basic assumptions of the participatory budgeting idea, in which it is the residents who should independently assess the rationality and suitability of the individual proposals). There were also some cases of rejecting proposals based on the potentially unfavourable effects they could have on the image of Sopot and its officials.\textsuperscript{65}

The final list of the projects put to the public vote was created as a result of long discussions between the members of the Commission for the participatory budgeting and the mayor’s plenipotentary. Among several hundreds of the submitted projects, over a dozen proposals were chosen for each of the four of Sopot districts and 22 were selected as the citywide projects. Selection criteria for classifying a project as a citywide was an estimated investment cost of over one million PLN. A full list of all of the projects put to vote was available before the voting date on the City Hall website. During the week of the vote, consultation meetings organized by the City Hall took place in the individual districts.

\textsuperscript{65} That was the case of the proposition to plant Caucasian palm trees in the city centre.
Voting papers with the list of proposed investments were sent to all residents via mail, again distributed in the form of widely delivered leaflets. They were also available in the City Hall and on its website, in the branches of the City Public Library and during consultation meetings. Altogether there have been 12 meetings, 3 per each district, attended by the representatives of the City Hall and several councilors working in the Commission for participatory budgeting. They all took place in September, that is c.a. 1.5 months before the public voting.

Finally, a decision was made to run a 6 day vote – voting was open between 2nd and 7th of November. Each of the Sopot residents could complete only one ballot paper in the electronic or hard copy, which then could be submitted to the City Hall during working hours or during open consultation meetings on the budget issues, or send online. Project proposals were printed on the voting paper in two columns (separately local and citywide projects), with their estimate cost and anticipated completion day of the investment. Each of the residents could choose a top five of the most important investments for implementation in the local area and in the whole city. Voting was divided into 4 constituencies.

City Hall received a total of 2448 voting papers, including 136 sent online (voting-age population of Sopot is about 33 thousand people, which makes the voter turnout of about 7%). After vote scoring carried out by the special commission consisting of councilors and employees of the City Hall, the mayor decided to recommend execution of the investments for the joint amount of 7 million PLN. Unfortunately, it must be noted that the mayor’s final decisions undermined the basic principles of the residents decisiveness in the participatory budgeting procedure: he ensured for himself the discretionary power of the decision with regards to the final projects recommendations for the budget. Using that prerogative, he put forward to the Council not only the projects that got the biggest support in the public vote (7 citywide and 6 local ones for each of the districts), but also some of the projects he himself chose, but which had further places on the list and were submitted outside of the agreed procedure. In the end all the projects presented to the Council summed up to the amount twice as big as initially expected to be allocated within the participatory budgeting process. The main controversy about the mayor’s decision concerned the fact that those two types of projects have not been in any way differentiated and were presented to the Council equally as “indicated by the residents”.

City Hall invested a lot of effort into the organization of the process, especially into the analysis of the submitted proposals. The mayor himself, however, was not particularly inclined to the reflective approach to the process, quite “loosely” treating all procedural issues and pushing for his own vision, which was not much different from the traditionally understood budget consultation, and furthermore – using the existing provisions of the Local Government Act – he neglected some of the resolutions and recommendations of the City Council Commission on the procedures for the participatory budgeting, for example on voting regulations.

Representatives of the Sopot Development Initiative took notice of the distinctive differences in the attitude towards the process on the side of the public originators and the City Hall. From their perspective, the initiative that originated as an attempt to introduce a new participatory mechanism that could become a repeatable solution for the city of Sopot to seriously involve residents into the decision making process concerning the city budget, was dominated by a more image-based outlook on the issue presented by the mayor and the City Hall. The SDI members strongly argued that while they themselves wanted to encourage residents primarily to deliberate on the needs of the local community, the most important
aspect of the process for the city officials was the number of people who finally took part in the public voting.  

Among gross procedural misconduct of the City Hall, the public side also pointed out the discretionary acceptance of the voting papers submitted outside the regulatory date of 7th of November. Regardless of the fact, that in the official statement the City Hall argued that it was a result of the good will, i.e. not wanting to create unnecessary obstacles for the voters, in reality such actions undermined the legitimacy of the whole process, suggesting that this procedure is not equally important as, for example local elections, hence does not need to be subjected to similarly high standards.

What is particularly important is that all of the activities of the authorities, related to the implementation of the participatory budgeting were publicly monitored by the members of the SDI, who took part in the meetings of the Commission for the participatory budgeting and City Council sessions. They analyzed decisions and actions of the mayor, and among other things, sent a request to the Council to create division in the budget proposal between projects chosen through voting and those “added” by the mayor outside of the official procedure etc. They also created a list of recommendations for the procedural changes for the implementation of the participatory budgeting in the following year.

IV. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The final decision on the issue of the “Budget for the city of Sopot for the year 2012” was made by the Sopot City Council during its session on 3.01.2012. Ultimately, the City Council decided to pull out from the list of the projects submitted within participatory budgeting three of the proposals for the joint amount of 2,1 million PLN, which were recommended by the mayor despite being placed lower on the list during residents vote – they were left in the budgetary project but with the annotation that they were added by the mayor. Seven citywide investments and 26 local ones, for the joint amount of 4 million PLN were included in the city budget as projects developed through the participatory budgeting procedure.

The very fact that the participatory budgeting was carried out in Sopot is a fairly big success and a “historical” event: Sopot is the first local government entity in Poland to opt for such a step. What is important is that ultimately the participatory budgeting method was sustained, and not only the budget consultations, in which case the result of the vote would not be in any way binding for the authorities. Another achievement was the ability to convince city officials - both elected councilors and City Hall employees - of such an

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66 Marcin Gerwin from the SDI actually described the officials’ attitude towards the process as demonstrating a “turnout fetish”.

67 Budget consultations meeting have been practiced in Sopot for several years. They usually have had a form of public meetings held in every district, during which the budget proposal was presented and residents could comment on it. Consultations provided residents of Sopot with an opportunity to introduce their own ideas about budget items, but there, the mayor was under no legal responsibility to take them into consideration while putting the budget proposal forward to the City Council. Unlike “mere” consultations, the participatory budgeting gives the residents a chance to propose their own projects to be financed from the city budget and guarantees that proposals chosen by the residents in the public vote are put forward by the mayor to the City Council to include them in the city budget plan.
approach, making them supporters of the idea by acting as “guardians” of the people’s proposals and securing the place for them in the city budget.

Project originators claim that participation of over 2000 of the Sopot residents should be perceived as a “decent” result, considering it was the first year of the project and even more so, a very innovative one in the Polish reality. Residents who participated in the process had a chance to “test” a new possible way of influencing the decisions made in the city, and ultimately have impact on the city’s final shape. The SDI’s ability to dispel the fears and doubts of the councilors and the mayor, who worried that the resident might not be interested in the subject or that they will submit ridiculous ideas, proved a crucial element of the project, especially since - as it turned out later on – residents’ proposals coincided with investment plans of the city companies. The mayor himself admitted that “the experiment was successful” and declared willingness to continue the project in the following year.

The key factor in the final success of the project was the appointment of the City Council Commission for the participatory budgeting. Residents interested in the project started to attend its meetings, which was a novelty in the daily operations of the Sopot City Council and gradually convinced the officials, that the initiative is important and that people find it interesting. Commission’s work also played an important role in the “education” of the officials, especially thanks to the direct contact with the residents – many of them changed their view on the possibilities of introducing elements of the participative democracy into the daily management of the city (such as prioritizing public spending and investments undertaken by the local government) and started to support the idea of the participatory budgeting. Some of the councilors declared that in the following year they would even consider putting to the residents vote all of the new investment resources. It can be perceived as a long term effect which will result in the opening of the Sopot authorities and institutions (City Hall) to the idea of including the residents in the decision making processes concerning spending of the public money.

Sopot authorities decided to repeat the participatory budgeting procedure in 2012. On 11th of May 2012 City Council adopted a Resolution on carrying public consultations with the Sopot residents on the Sopot City Budget for the year 2013, including a provision directly stating the name of the process as the “participatory budgeting” (first such act in the Polish local law). The law stipulates the rules for this year’s edition of the project. However, it was not accomplished without the debate between the authorities and the residents: primary version of the Resolution, prepared by the City Hall was not consulted with the residents and contained the provision granting a special team formed by the councilors and City Hall officials the right to authoritatively reject people’s projects before they are even posted on the voting list, based on the subjective judgment of their “futility”.

Members of the Sopot Development Initiative, who had some suggestions to the provisions of the Resolution, which were based on the experiences from the first edition of the budgeting, used a law included in the City Charter allowing a group of residents to submit amendments to the City Council Resolutions. Even during the Council’s session during which the vote on the Resolution was to take place, the mayor plenipotentiary, on the mayor’s behalf, tried to remove the provisions stipulating the amount for this year’s participatory budgeting. Nevertheless, councilors did not allow it and finally adopted the Resolution with

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68 It is a residents’ prerogative resulting from the article 19 of the Rules of the Sopot City Council, allowing a group of at least 25 residents to formally propose amendments to every resolution project that is processed by the City Council.
all of the ground rules and assumptions of the good practices of the participatory budgeting, including rank vote (allowing to rank projects on the scale), full obligatory disclosure of the proposed projects (positively and negatively reviewed from both, the formal-legal and economical perspective) together with the justification. Simultaneously, participatory budgeting implementation schedule for the year 2012 was established – it is already known that it will be carried out between June, 1st and November, 15th.

Sopot’s example was met with a lot of interest across Poland and in 2012 more cities declared they will commence work on the pilot realization of similar projects in their area. Organisers of the Sopot process – activists and committed councilors – share their experiences from the implementation of the process during various meetings (seminars, conferences) and are invited to cooperation as experts by various other local governments and organizations interested in the idea of participatory budgeting.
Case Study No. 2

Public Consultations in Czestochowa

This case study was based on an in-depth interview with the manager of the Local Initiatives and Public Consultations Bureau – Ms Agata Wierny, who was responsible for organizing and implementing the whole consultation process. Additional sources of information which were analysed were: results of a consultation survey (the key tool used in the process), promotional materials issued by the Bureau, articles in local press, posts and comments on the website of the Local Initiatives and Public Consultations Bureau.

I. THE CONTEXT AND ISSUE

The process presented herein pertains to an attempt to define changes of the traffic management on one of the central streets (Aleje Najświętszej Maryi Panny - eng. Avenue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which leads to the biggest attractions of the city – Jasna Gora Monastery) in Czestochowa, one of the Polish medium-sized cities (population: 238 04269). As one of the main streets of Czestochowa, Avenue of the BVM is used by different types of users: drivers, motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians, so a consistent system of traffic management was really needed. The idea for the consultation came as a result of the futility of the solutions implemented so far, which did not guarantee safety of all users.

Consultations were held in March and April 2011. This initiative coincided with the renovation work carried out as a part of the reconstruction of the Avenue according to which the middle lane was to be a pedestrian area, with a total ban on bicycles. However, this regulation was not adapted to the day-to-day usage of the artery: with the Avenue being a popular walking spot, used, among others, by parents with children on bicycles afraid to use the main road with heavy car and bus traffic, a lot of people were breaking the law and cycling on the middle lane of the Avenue.

Residents were also divided over the law regarding the motorcycles, complained about by the city centre residents: in 2010 city authorities lifted a total ban on those vehicles on the Avenue, setting a time limit from 6am until 10pm on the motorcycle traffic. Motorcyclists protested against such solution, pointing out that it is an example of the discrimination against them as rightful road users; it was also argued that it is a form of unjust “favoring” of the Avenue with the solutions not used with regard to any other street in the city. There was a general perception of the traffic management in the Avenue as confusing and leading to misunderstandings and in need of regulations, so that the residents could use the pedestrian lane safely and without breaking the law.

II. THE ACTORS

Due to the nature of the subject of the consultations, the process was specially designed to enable participation of all of the Czestochowa’s residents. Simultaneously, a lot of effort was put into assuring that those particularly affected by the changes - cyclists and motorcyclists - took part in the process. The consultation stage was preceded by a very extensive information campaign, led by the local authorities, delivered through a variety of communication channels. They were selected to allow both Internet users and those without online access to express their opinion on planned actions and become a vital part of the changes. As part of the information campaign, 5000 leaflets were distributed among the city residents, and 350 posters were placed around the city - on the poles owned by the Local Department of Road and Transport (municipal unit responsible for traffic management and transportation), on the public transport stops, in many public institutions, such as libraries, offices, and also in the shops and coffee shops.

Additionally, in the period between 3rd and 16th March 2011, information posters were exhibited in the public transport vehicles – buses and trams (fee was paid to the Local Public Transport Office). Two banners were also placed along the Avenue and on the Bieganski Sq, informing about the consultation meeting on March 16th, with the aim to reach the actual users of this space (passersby, drivers, cyclists, who actually appear on this street).

Local media were also used to promote the consultations. Information in the media – articles or announcements and mentions, during daily news for example – were published for free (press, TV and radio), in outlets representing different ideological options and reaching various types of recipients. Announcements inviting people to take part in the consultations were also posted in two publications of the Czestochowa City Council – directory “What, where, when in Czestochowa?” and City Bulletin of Czestochowa. Consultations were also promoted online: on the city website: www.czestochowa.pl and city’s consultations portal www.konsultacje.czestochowa.pl and two, most popular in Poland, social networks: www.nk.pl and www.facebook.com. Urban ‘infomats’ (machines with the internet access set in various locations throughout the city) were also used to promote the consultations – special screen savers informing resident about the consultation activities were used.

Different methods of consultations were selected to enable all of the residents to voice their opinion: both the hard copies of a survey (widely distributed), as well as the electronic ones were used (respondents were asked to select one variant of traffic management), round table open meeting was organised together with the local consultations point, located in the vicinity of Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) Avenue; additionally, internet users had a chance to leave their comments on the specially created forum (more details about the design of the consultation process in further sections).

Particular care was taken to encourage the participation of cyclists’ and motorcyclists’ organisations. The latter ones were particularly active a year before, when the mayor lifted the motorcycle ban, allowing them to use BVM Avenue, replacing it with the time limit (motorcycle traffic was banned from 10pm until 6am). The implementation of this law was perceived by motorcyclists as an act of discrimination against them and prompted them to joint protests. Despite the fact that at the time it made no difference, during the consultation process described in this document, organisers contacted all individuals and organisations active during protests, encouraging them to participate in the process. Very helpful in the efforts to reach the relevant non-governmental organisations was the fact that the municipal
entity responsible for the organisation of the process (Local Initiatives and Public Consultations Bureau [LIPCB] - pl. Biuro Inicjatyw Lokalnych i Konsultacji Społecznych) deals with the local organisations on a daily basis – therefore was able to provide a database with contacts to most of them.

On behalf of the process initiators, local authorities, not only people directly involved in the organisation of the consultations took part in the process, but also employees of the Local Department of Road and Transport supported it as experts. Additionally, the mayor took part in some stages of the consultations process (which helped to build its prestige).

III. THE PROCESS

The process carried out in Czestochowa was organised in the form of public consultation, the procedure specified in the law as a way of consulting the citizens by the authorities. In Poland, this type of public dialogue tool is mandatory only in a few cases, such as with regards to decisions pertaining to land use, change in territorial range or names of local government entities or environmental decisions. The act also allows using this tool in other cases, recognized as important and worth consulting with the residents by the local authorities (in this case the mayor). However, it is important to point out that the Polish law does not specify the regulations that such processes should comply with (with the exception of the minimum time). Nevertheless, it is possible for local governments to create the rules and regulations of public consultations on their own, defining mode and manner of carrying out such processes.

That is what happened in Czestochowa – the City Council implemented a set of Regulations for the consultations (preceded by extensive consultations). The consultation process described in this document was carried out with accordance to the accepted principles. Formally, the idea to carry out the consultations regarding bicycle traffic in the middle lane of the Avenue of the Blessed Virgin Mary came from 5 of the city councilors, who submitted the motion to the mayor. The mayor adopted the motion and on the 4th of February 2011 issued a Directive, initiating the consultations process and defining its details.

The specific character of this type of processes assumes that the gathered opinions constitute auxiliary materials that could be helpful for the authorities while they debate on forming the final decision. It signifies that the authorities are not bound by the results of the consultations, but they are obliged to present them to the public and refer to them when announcing their final decision. In this case, final results of the consultations were fully approved by the mayor, whose final decree based on those results changed the existing local law for traffic management.

Before commencing the actual consultation process, possible solutions for traffic management on BVM Avenue were prepared by the experts from the Department of Roads and Transport in the Czestochowa Municipality Council. During the first stage of consultations, from 1st until 18th of March 2011, all Czestochowa residents had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the process and submit their opinions and suggestions to the

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70 It is one of the permitted ways of initiating a public consultation process regarding significant public issues in Czestochowa.
presented proposal, as well as introduce their own proposed solutions. They could do it in one of the following ways:

- in a written form:
  - at the offices of the Local Initiatives and Public Consultations Bureau (entity responsible for the organisation of the public consultations in the city),
  - at the offices of the Department of Roads and Transport,
  - at the offices of the Czestochowa City Hall,
  - sent via mail to one of the abovementioned public institutions.
- through the online platform www.konsultacje.czestochowa.pl.
- or by sending an email to: konsultacje@czestochowa.um.gov.pl.

In total, the Local Initiatives and Public Consultations Bureau received 132 opinions, which were then divided according to the type of suggested solutions. This way, 6 options for bicycle traffic and 3 for motorcycle traffic were formed, which were then presented as discussion points during an open consultation meeting on 16th of March 2011.

Parallel to the opinion submitting process, a so called “flying consultation point” was organised and put up on Saturday, 5th of March 2011 in the strict city centre – on Bieganski Sq, placed in the middle lane of BVM Avenue. At the post, situated inside the tent branded by the City Hall, residents had an opportunity to learn about the possible option for bicycle traffic formed by the department specialists and also submit their own ideas for the solutions regarding the single-track vehicle traffic on the Avenue. Both, employees of the Consultation Bureau and road traffic specialists were on call at the post, answering any potential questions. The mayor was also on call for 1,5 h during the point’s working hours, talking to the residents about the possible solutions. Popularity of the point was additionally enhanced by the fact that at the time, in the area where the post was situated, a street carnival was taking place – many residents, who came to take part in the carnival, also voiced their opinion on the issue of the traffic regulations in BVM Avenue.

On the 16th of March 2011 at 5pm, an open round table consultation meeting with the residents was organised. It was held in the Local Initiative and Public Consultation Bureau, on 19/21 Focha Street. 69 people attended the meeting, including the Mayor, City Councilors, District Councils representatives, experts from the Department of Roads and Transport and the representatives of the motorcycle and bicycle circles, who received individual invitations to the meeting.

The meeting was facilitated by the moderator from the Polish Institute of Mediation and Social Integration (a local independent NGO, specializing in mediations). In the course of the meeting the 6 options for the bicycle traffic and 3 options for motorcycle traffic regulations were analyzed, those prepared by the Local Department of Roads and Transport, as well as those submitted by the residents during the first stage of the consultation. The discussion was co-hosted by the mayor, who personally summarized each of its stages. All options were submitted to a detailed analysis, listing pros and cons, finally choosing 3 options for the bicycle traffic and 3 for the motorcycle traffic, which were chosen as best in the joint discussion. Based on those options, officials of the Local Initiative and Public Consultation Bureau prepared a survey for the residents.

Paper copies of the survey were available in the Main Information Offices in two of the Czestochowa City Hall Offices and in the District Councils offices. It was also possible to download it online from the www.konsultacje.czestochowa.pl website. Completed surveys
were collected from 1\textsuperscript{st} until 14\textsuperscript{th} April 2011. In total, 891 surveys were collected. Options, which received the highest number of votes from the residents, were then submitted for evaluation to the experts from the Local Department of Roads and Transport, Road Traffic Section of the City Police in Czestochowa and the City Office for Transport and Communication, and then presented together with the evaluations for a final decision.

\textbf{IV. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES}

Based on all of the opinions gathered during public consultations “Cyclists-friendly Avenue?”, on 19th of May 2011 the mayor made a decision with regards to the regulation of the bicycle and motorcycle traffic on the Avenue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in accordance with the residents’ indications from the survey, which was immediately announced on the city’s website dedicated to consultations. A report summarizing the consultation process was published on the same website on 31st of May.

The option chosen for the motorcycle traffic grants them use of the Avenue with no time restrictions, only within limits of the current Road Transport Law. As, among other things, mentioned in the official summary of the consultation “it is a solution embedded in the worldwide trend to use smaller vehicles, as a result of the limited number of the parking spaces. It builds an image of Czestochowa as the city that is modern and friendly to all types of transportation”. It was agreed that after the implementation of the new set of traffic regulations, Local Department of Roads and Transport together with the police will monitor the statistics of the traffic incidents on the Avenue involving bicycles and motorcycles, to modify the regulations if the need occurred.

The option chosen for the bicycle traffic grants cyclists the use of the middle lane of the Avenue, which will remain pedestrian (there will be no cycle path), with bicycle traffic possible also on the two remaining lanes. This solution sanction the way the middle lane was actually used to date, but which was banned by the previous regulations. One of the arguments supporting this solution was the fact that sharing the common space by pedestrians and cyclists will make everyone involved more cautious, whereas with the designated cycle path, cyclist would probably reach significant speed increasing the risk of collisions with the pedestrians, who due to the character of the Avenue would inevitably stroll onto the cycle path. Chosen options is said to guarantee “peaceful coexistence” of the two different types of road users: experienced cyclists will be able to ride on the road, away from the pedestrians, while those who prefer to cycle down the middle lane (for example: parents with children), should cycle slowly, without speeding. The chosen option was also seen as the easiest one to implement and most economically viable, as it did not require a dedicated cycle path, and also as the one which will not destroy the esthetics of the passage with the asphalt bike lane or painted lanes dividing the path on the new, granite surface. For the accurate designation of the new regulations, the Department of Roads and Transport installed special “road for pedestrians and cyclists” signs along the BVM Avenue, below the existing C-16 vertical signs (a sign signifying a pedestrian road). Signs banning motorcycles from entering the Avenue between 10pm and 6am were also taken down.

Apart from the direct effects of the consultation, it is also worth to highlight the more general ones. Most of all, this widely promoted and carefully carried out process increased the understanding of the mechanism of the public consultations and the opportunities it creates
among all Czestochowa residents. The fact that the results of the consultations were accepted and quickly implemented proved to all those involved, that taking part in such processes is worthwhile, and the opinions collected that way are really taken into consideration. It would seem that this way of coming to a final decision had a mitigating effect on the conflict between various users of the same space (resident of the local buildings, motorcyclists, cyclists, pedestrians). The opportunity to listen to the arguments of the other side of the conflict (mostly during the open meeting) helped everyone involved to find some common ground and develop a compromise version of the traffic regulations.
Case Study No. 3

Revitalisation in Nikiszowiec

The following description was made on the basis of two interviews conducted during a visit in Katowice: one with the employees of the Local Activity Centre in Nikiszowiec and the other with the civil servant from the Urban Development Department of the Katowice City Hall. Other sources of information were:

- web pages:
  - www.katowice.eu – page of the Katowice City Hall, subpage about revitalization (including revitalization process in Nikiszowiec)
  - www.nikiszowiec.pl – page about Nikiszowiec in Katowice, partly administered by the Local Activity Centre

- documents
  - Katowice Revitalization Programme for the years 2007-2013
  - draft of the Integrated Urban Renewal Programme

I. THE CONTEXT

Nikiszowiec is a historic settlement, built over 100 year ago for the miners from the “Giesche” (currently “Wieczorek”) coal mines and their families. It has, almost from the very beginning of its existence, been self-sufficient: with two schools, a hospital, shops, post office, and later on also a church; it was electrified, had its own water supply and sewerage system; all clear examples of the idea of binding employees to their workplace, popular before 1989. However, with the fall of the Polish People’s Republic (Polish: PRL) and political and economic transformation in the nineties, the downfall of the estate has begun. People were forced to organize their lives on their own, cultural units deteriorated. Many people left the coal mines, women were forced to look for work and children were left on their own. The estate started to be perceived as a poor and dangerous place.

Situation changed significantly in 2008. The newly created Local Activity Centre in Nikiszowiec developed a local map of resources and needs, which was a detailed diagnosis of the social situation on the estate and organized a fair celebrating the 100th anniversary of the settlement. Since then, celebrations like this - integrating and activating local community, have been held each year. Many other activities also started to take place, such as meetings,

71 The Local Activity Centre is a program in the Municipal Unit of Social Help in Katowice and so it operates within its structures. The objective of the Centre is to enhance the activity of inhabitants and local institutions, so they can solve important social problems by themselves.
Neighbors’ Day celebrations and church fairs. The Local Activity Centre is a program in the Municipal Unit of Social Help in Katowice and so it operates within its structures. The objective of the Centre is to enhance the activity of inhabitants and local institutions, so they can solve important social problems by themselves.

Nikiszowiec, with its characteristic red-brick buildings and layout dividing it into nine quarters, in 1978 was enlisted in the Register of Monuments of the Katowice Voivodeship, and in 2011 received the status of National History Memorial. Hence, any spatial changes need to be consulted with a conservator.

II. THE ISSUE

The participatory process described in this document pertains to creating an Integrated Urban Renewal Programme (IURP) for Nikiszowiec – the historic housing estate of the city of Katowice. Development of the IURP was derived from the NODUS project, implemented as part of the EU URBACT II Programme, incorporated by Katowice City in November 2008. Project pertained to the issues of spatial planning and regeneration of urban spaces (Linking Urban Renewal and Regional Spatial Planning) and focused on the exchange of experiences between the cities and regions from various parts of Europe who participated in the programme.

NODUS’s assumption was that each of the members of the project (city or region) would establish a Local Support Group, consisting of the representatives of the local organizations, institutions and various levels of the administration, specialists from various scientific fields, politicians etc. In order to implement the project in Katowice, Working Team consisting of the representatives of the City Hall units was set up. The Local Support Group was responsible for a regular cooperation and consultation with the working team, as well as theoretical support in the development of the Local Action Plan, which was the main project’s objective.

The choice of the region which was to become a subject matter of the Local Action Plan had been made based on the quantitative−descriptive analysis, prepared by the City Development Department. Statistical data and experts opinions were used as the source information. Analysis was carried out for four of the Katowice’s areas (including Nikiszowiec) which, together with the additional five regions, had already been indicated for revitalisation in Katowice Revitalization Programme for the years 2007-2013. With the choice of the Nikiszowiec region, not only the results of the experts’ analysis were considered, but

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72 Operational Programme URBACT II is one of the programmes of the 3rd objective of the European Union cohesion policy “European Territorial Cooperation”. Its main objective is the exchange of experience between member countries of the European Union (plus Norway and Switzerland) with regards to sustainable and integrated urban development.

73 The Local Support Group in Katowice consisted of the representatives of the following institutions: University of Economics in Katowice, Regional Development Bureau, Revitalisation Forum Association, Modern City Institute, Silesian University in Katowice, Marshall’s Office of Silesian Voivodeship, the Local Activity Centre in Nikiszowiec and Jan Olbrycht PhD, MP in European Parliament.

74 The working team consisted of the employees of the City Council: Urban Development Department, Spatial Planning Department, European Funds Bureau, Foreign Department, Accounting Department, the City Budget Department.
also the trans-local character of the area (Nikiszowiec assets as a well know point of a historical and architectonical value would make the general effects of the undertaken activities beneficial for the whole region). How fast and spectacular could the results of the potential changes be made during the revitalization process was also taken into consideration. Moreover, Nikiszowiec was selected thanks to its active local community (the residents have been organizing together local fairs and raising money to install surveillance in the estate), ready to become a part of the initiated actions and due to the organisations operating on the estate – potential project’s partners, which could facilitate communication and cooperation between the City Hall and local residents. The above diagnosis was also complemented by a short survey distributed among the residents, with three open questions about the advantages, disadvantages and expected changes in Nikiszowiec, carried out by the City Development Department during one of the local holidays.

The NODUS project ended in June 2010 when the work on establishing IURP commenced, with its basic assumptions defined in the Local Action Plan. The process of developing IURP, which took place between June 2010 and September 2011, is the subject of the below description.

III. THE ACTORS

The process was initiated by the City Development Department of the Katowice City Hall. IURP was developed based on the wide consultations with the local community and cooperation with the local project partners. Main liaison between the City Hall employees and the residents was the Local Activity Centre in Nikiszowiec (operating within the structures of a public institution which is the Municipal Unit of Social Help in Katowice), familiar with the community of Nikiszowiec, and a specialist with an extensive experience in carrying out such processes in a participatory way.

All stakeholders, not just the estate residents, were included in the work on the IURP: local partners represented by members of the organizations operating in the Nikiszowiec area, estate managers, local businessman, and representatives of the Silesian Marshall’s Office and other units of the Katowice City Hall. Representatives of the Nikiszowiec Estate (including Local Activity Centre) had already been invited to participate in the NODUS project while attending workshop meetings of the team working on the Local Action Plan. During those meetings, issues such as characteristic values of Nikiszowiec which would need strengthening (social activity, cultural heritage) were discussed, as well as the issues which could become the core of the actions initiated in the area (local identity, modernity).

Initiative to create IURP came from the representatives of the Katowice City Hall and as a document became an added value, following the City’s participation in the abovementioned NODUS project, which normally ends with the development of the Local Action Plan and Final Report. Initiating work on the development of the IURP proved to be a milestone for the Nikiszowiec estate and the beginning of a very interesting participatory process.

The key factor in the successful development of the IURP (despite the fact that it will be some time before the implementation decision is made and effects become visible) turned out to be the engagement of all of the potential stakeholders and close cooperation between the organizers (City Hall officials) and local organizations, which prepared the grounds for the
effective and free dialog with the Nikiszowiec residents. An external expert experienced in working with local communities and responsible for the creation of the document also played a very important role. He was also invited by the officials from the Katowice City Hall to be the person facilitating contacts between residents of Nikiszowiec and city officials.

IV. THE PROCESS

Development of the IURP was based on the detailed diagnosis of the starting-point, meetings and workshops with the residents and lectures for the residents on the issues related to the revitalization processes. In May 2010 during local THE Neighbors’ Day, a public opinion poll was carried out in Nikiszowiec through the distribution of leaflets among the residents. Leaflets contained short notes on the revitalization issue and three questions regarding the situation in Nikiszowiec. Throughout the process of the IURP development, the Local Activity Centre in Nikiszowiec was acting as a partner and advisor to the organizers of the process from the City Hall.

Work on the IURP was divided into four meetings – workshops with the residents (run monthly), preceded by two introductory meetings, organized by the City Development Department. The first information meeting took place on 17th June 2010; with the objective to introduce residents to the issue of revitalization and - with the help of the Local Activity Centre in Nikiszowiec - initiate contact between residents and representatives of the City Hall.

The next meeting, during which an expert responsible for the development of the IURP was introduced, took place on 23rd November 2010. Part of this meeting was organized in a form of a workshop, with residents asked to indicate the evocative areas of Nikiszowiec and the ones which should be revitalized. Thanks to the use of maps during this workshop, all of the results could be then transferred into one big map, allowing the presentation of a full spectrum of residents’ opinions. Moreover, a full schedule of the future activities in the development of the IURP was announced.

Each of the following meetings had a similar course: in the beginning the results of the previous workshop were discussed, both from the more theoretical as well as the workshop perspective, before moving on to the next issue. Starting from the second workshop, discussions on the subject matter of the IURP were enriched by lectures from the “Revitalization University” series (organized upon residents’ request, to meet their needs for the greater access to information on revitalization and city development processes).

The first workshop titled: “Revitalization of Nikiszowiec – Market Square, how and what next?” took place on 1st of March 2011. Among others, it was attended by: the vice-president of the Katowice City and the Silesian Heritage Conservator, as well as the representatives of the city units (the Crisis Management Department, Social Policy Department, Urban Green Department, Municipal Department for Roads and Bridges). Current issues of the estate were discussed, as well as those related to the renovation of the Market Square (such as change in traffic management and its consequences) and conservation requirements for facilities listed on the monuments register. Meeting was completed with a “homework” for attendees to take some pictures of the “things they like” and “things they don’t like” in Nikiszowiec.
The second workshop was preceded by a lecture from the “Revitalization University” series titled: “How does a city work?” given by a chairman of the Economic Development of Municipalities Association (5th April 2011). The next day, a workshop titled: “Public spaces of Nikiszowiec and safety – quality of living on the estate and surrounding areas” took place. It started with a presentation compiled from the pictures send by the estate residents, which was used as a start-up point for further discussion on the estate’s condition. Some of the issues raised were advertising, parking spaces, public toilets, recycling and, in the context of safety which is one of the main problems in Nikiszowiec, monitoring and street lighting. Meeting was attended by the estate managers of Nikiszowiec and local businessmen.

The third workshop was also preceded by a lecture (4th May 2011), this time concerned with the issues of the cultural heritage and various forms of its protection with relation to Nikiszowiec. Lecture titled: “Cultural heritage in city’s life and its protection through the UNESCO World Heritage List” was given by the City Heritage Conservator. The discussion was concluded with the statement, that regardless of how long it may take for Nikiszowiec to be included in the UNESCO list or what is the probability of the successful enlisting, an attempt to do so would be highly beneficial for the area.

Over the workshop titled: “Renovation of the residential developments and social infrastructure”, there was a presentation of the diagnosis of the lighting condition and modern recycling solutions, prepared by the selected participants of the previous workshop. Material containing detailed diagnosis of the lighting conditions in Nikiszowiec was later incorporated into the IURP project. During the meeting the following points were discussed: factors which could help organize and encourage tourism in Nikiszowiec, more effective ways of the estate management and furthermore, due to the limited financial resources, most urgent renovation and modernization work (which also became a task for the next meeting).

On the 2nd of June 2011 the fourth and last workshop titled: “Social and economic initiatives – new features on the estate” was held. Suggestions of the possible social and economic initiatives to be implemented in Nikiszowiec were discussed. Suggestions pertained to the development of the “Operating Procedure” (indicating entities responsible for particular elements of the estate in order to simplify potential interventions from the residents) and the “Residents Handbook” (describing their rights and responsibilities). The residents were also shown the basic principles of the project development (as their proposals for revitalization were to be translated into projects within the IURP). On the 7th of June, the last lecture took place, which was a description of the revitalization experience of the city of Poznan. A speech on “Social project for Revitalization Programme for the Poznan City – experiences, concepts, dilemmas” was given by the representative of the Revitalization Department of the Poznan City Hall.

Before and after each workshop residents had an opportunity to talk individually with an expert on revitalization. Three additional days were also dedicated to it after the end of the series of meetings. This form of contact was promoted during meetings through invitations, posters and information send via email. In the meantime, several “specialist” meetings for various groups of stakeholders were organized in the City Hall, including the ones for the local businessmen and estate managers in Nikiszowiec.

The IURP, written by an expert responsible for the development phase, between 19th and 30th of September, was available in the City Hall and in the Local Activity Centre in Nikiszowiec. Comments and suggestions could be submitted during working days, additionally, on chosen days an expert was on call along with the document. Contents of the
IURP were also available on the Katowice City Hall website. As part of the consultations, some, but not many, of the residents and organizations submitted their comments.

Information about the document’s development were systematically posted online (on the Katowice City Hall website www.katowice.eu and on the www.nikiszowiec.pl website administrated by the Local Activity Centre), on the posters placed round the estate (including on the doors of the St. Anna Parish House, where most of the meetings took place) and in the local newspaper. Work on the IURP was supported by other activities promoting the endeavor. On 18th of April a competition for the design of the IURP logo for children from primary and middle schools in Nikiszowiec was organized. The results were announced on 27th of May during local Neighbors’ Day. More than 100 works were submitted, which were later exhibited in the local branch of the Katowice History Museum in Nikiszowiec.

Apart from an opportunity to participate in the meetings and workshops, residents also had a chance to take part in the survey, related to the quality of life in Nikiszowiec, which was sent out in May 2011 to all households on the estate (around 1400 flats), and additionally to apply for a focus group created to rate, and in the future evaluate the IURP. The survey was a detailed questionnaire, an extended version of the research carried out during Neighbors’ Day in May 2010. It researched the quality of life on the estate. 73 people responded to the questions. Survey was developed in a close cooperation with the Local Activity Centre and will be used to update the map of resources and needs of the estate, initially prepared by the Centre in 2008.

V. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The outcome of the work was the development of the Integrated Urban Renewal Programme for Nikiszowiec, which included general characteristics of the estate (apart from the city and region), references to other existing strategic documents pertaining to the issue of revitalization of Katowice, a revitalization activities programme aggregated in 27 projects (with a division into social, spatial and economic projects), which reflected the suggestions made during the revitalisation meetings. The IURP also contained the description of the project implementation (programme management, funding and evaluation). Authors of a few of the projects were the non-governmental organisations, which were informed about the process and invited to take part in it from the beginning.

Comments and suggestions to the IURP submitted as a part of the document consultations will be analyzed and, depending on the results of the analysis, included (or not) into the document. City projects will be consulted with the Units of the Katowice City Hall - leaders of the particular projects. Moreover, the city will initiate development of the communication platform with the management entities (including the Company and the Housing Cooperative), to organize a system for the IURP implementation. The success of the projects implementation will depend on the financial capacity of the individual partners and the level of coordination of the activities from the City Hall. The organizers of the process from the City Hall hope for the IURP to receive the status of a resolution of the City Council.

The operational model developed during the work on the NODUS project, related to the choice of the area in urgent need of intervention and programming of the integrated revitalization activities might also become useful for other areas intended for revitalization, indicated in the Local Revitalization Programme.
In the end, it is worth to explain what makes the Revitalization Programme for Nikiszowiec “integrated”. It is integrated on at least two levels. The first level includes the integration of the subject matter, which means combining spatial, as well as social, cultural and economic issues in one document, making the revitalization a comprehensive process, determining the development of each aspect of the communities’ lives. Second level of the integration is related to the entities, which took part in the IURP development and which are going to implement it in the later stages. Individual groups of stakeholders mentioned in the above description should cooperate with each other as partners in order for the project to have visible effects in the future.

Activities of the Local Activity Centre are still carried out in the Nikiszowiec area at the moment. The main aim of the Centre is to increase the awareness of the estate residents and local institutions for the independent way of solving public issues. Activities within the IURP development contributed, to some extent, in strengthening the local community, as proved by the revival of the meetings of the Revitalization University. Three meetings are planned to take place: on principals of the housing cooperative operations, caring for the estate’s green areas and appointing social custodian of the Nikiszowiec monuments. A training seminar titled: “Social organizations in the process of revitalization” is also planned. The main aim of the seminar is “to deliver information and possibilities for the exchange of experiences on the subject of the NGO’s participation in building, updating, monitoring and implementing revitalization projects”75. Apart from the educational activities, the activities integrating residents are also an important part of strengthening the estate’s community, for example by continuous celebrations of the Neighbors’ Day, which are a vital part of the revitalization activities and help the revival of the estate.

75 www.nikiszowiec.pl, last accessed May 2012.
Slovakia
Introduction

As in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, civil society and the non-profit sector in Slovakia have changed dramatically since 1989, when the Communist Party's monopoly on power was broken by the Velvet Revolution and Czechoslovakia started its slow transformation into a democratic state. Before 1989 civil society may have existed but its role was reduced to the organization of leisure-time activities and it was expected not to interfere in issues considered conflictual by the authorities.

Since then the situation has changed considerably, mainly as a result of the introduction of freedom of speech and freedom of association. An opponent of the Communist regime and dissident, Vaclav Havel, was elected President of Czechoslovakia in December 1989 by the Communist Party-controlled Parliament. The first free elections took place in 1990, which led to the formation of a democratic government. Censorship was abolished, new media were established and people gained free access to independent information. The legislative framework for civil society was established and many non-governmental, not-for-profit organizations were created or revived activities after periods of dormancy. These organizations focused on addressing environmental or social problems, improving the situation in schools and health care centers, developing communities, providing care and activities for young people and elderly people and providing support to the vulnerable. Organizations whose main aim is building a pluralistic and democratic society also emerged.

In the Czechoslovakia of the early 1990s nationalism, which had been suppressed during Communism, reappeared and became an issue again. Nevertheless, the nationalistic disputes between Czechs and Slovaks were peaceful and resulted in the split of Czechoslovakia and in the establishment of two independent democratic states in January 1993 – the Czech and the Slovak Republics.

After the parliamentary election of June 1992, the two main political actors decided to dissolve Czechoslovakia and to create two independent states. They did so parties after intense negotiations with each other, but without consulting the population in a referendum. Populist Vladimír Mečiar, the leader of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Hnutie za demokraticke Slovensko, HZDS) and who was to serve as Slovakia’s prime minister three times, exhibited increasingly authoritarian behavior and pursued a policy of complete control over the state. The period from 1993 and 1998 during which Mečiar was in power was known as ‘illiberal democracy’. During this time, Slovakia displayed an institutionalized pattern of politics that was deficient in democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law and that was inconsistent with international norms. Thus, Slovakia was not considered for membership in the either European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1997, during the NATO’s first post-Cold War round of enlargement, Slovakia was not invited to join, while the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were. These countries become members of NATO in 1999, whereas Slovakia was only in a position to join in 2004.

This period of the history of the independent Slovakia was characterised by a lack of transparency on the part of the government, a lack of foreign investment, isolation from the international community, the active surveillance of independent media, NGOs and religious

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76 This misrule led Madeleine Albright, the then-U.S. Secretary of State, to call Slovakia a “black hole in the heart of Europe”.
communities, the misuse of the intelligence services for improper purposes, and illegal activities, including the kidnapping of the son of then-President Michal Kovač. The situation for non-governmental organizations also got worse during the Mečiar era. The nationalistic government blamed non-governmental organizations and their leaders for being ‘against Slovakia’s independence’. From one perspective this could be considered true. Public opinion polls held at the time showed only minimal support for the nationalistic ideas promoting the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. NGO leaders were accused of receiving money from foreign donors to continue their activities in opposition to the government and the ‘independent Slovakia’. In response to independent NGO criticism of the political establishment and in an attempt to sideline the “Gremium of the Third Sector” (a transparently elected platform of representatives of independent NGOs, also known as G3S) the government created a network of pro-government NGOs and NGO platforms.

The aim of G3S was to develop partner relationships and coordination between representatives of the government, self-governments, the business sector and trade unions, as well as with national and international organizations. It was established in 1995 as a multi-member representative, and it organized annual cooperation conferences for the NGO sector in Slovakia, known as the ‘Stupava Conferences’. The main tasks of G3S were to represent and pursue the interests of NGOs, to initiate public debates and advocacy campaigns, formulate common positions and issue common statements of the NGO sector, enter into cooperation agreements with other sectors, explain and popularize the role of the NGO sector, coordinate information and service activities for NGOs. In the mid-1990’s, Mečiar’s government stepped up control over civic activities by passing new and more restrictive laws on foundations, public benefit non-profit organizations and non-investment funds, using fabricated scandals as a pretext. The government entered into open confrontation with the NGOs, which, in turn, stepped up their public advocacy and campaigning.

G3S announced a Third Sector SOS campaign as a reaction the preparation of the new law on foundations. The proposal was secretly prepared by the Mečiar’s government in late 1995 and the G3S was not invited to take part in consultations about it. The atmosphere became increasingly nasty – civil society organisations were accused of fraud and of financial misappropriations. The new piece of legislation was presented as a means of imposing stricter control over foundations. In June 1995 the Central Tax Directorate decided to conduct audits in 331 foundations but found no major malpractices. G3S protested against constant attacks on the independent civil sector. More than 300 NGOs joined the campaign which peaked with three protest gatherings in Košice, Banská Bystrica and Bratislava on the eve of the parliamentary debate over the law.

More than 150 amendment proposals were submitted during the debate, mainly by the opposition parties, but almost all of these were rejected and the law was passed with the support of the ruling coalition. Although the president returned the law to parliament, it was adopted after a repeat vote. The Third Sector SOS campaign did not achieve its ultimate goal of stopping the new law on foundations from being passed, but it was the first coordinated protest of civil society against the government’s increasing encroachment on the independent

78 Ibid.
civic sector. It mobilised numerous actors and demonstrated that civil society could speak with a united voice against the increasingly autocratic style of the government. For the first time since 1989, and in a country with little experience of coordinated resistance against oppression, this advocacy campaign built the foundations for future initiatives. It encouraged others to voice their concerns and interests and catalysed further civic mobilisation.  

In 1997, the government announced that a referendum would be held on NATO accession and on the direct election of the President, which eventually failed amid massive political controversy and an opposition boycott. This and the fact that the ruling coalition adopted a new and more restrictive law on elections in advance of the 1998 general election, caused outcry among Slovakia’s civic actors, mobilizing them and many voters for change. In the second half of 1997, an NGO-led civic campaign for free and fair elections entitled OK ‘98 was developed as an attempt to engage citizens in the election process, taking a clear non-partisan approach.

The Civic Campaign OK ‘98 was an open NGO initiative, which aimed at increasing the awareness of voters about the parliamentary and municipal elections taking place in 1998, increasing citizen participation in the elections, increasing their influence on the preparation of election laws and ensuring civil supervision of the election process. The campaign was initiated by eleven NGOs, which felt the need for increased citizen participation and voter turnout. The campaign’s non-partisan approach was reflected in its focus on free and fair elections rather than on particular parties, coalitions, movements or candidates. The campaign also supported the legitimate expression of citizens’ free will, helped secure fair political competition in the pre-election campaign as well as civic supervision over the elections. Within the scope of the OK ‘98 campaign, almost 60 independent information, education and monitoring projects were prepared. The majority of these were of a regional character, but there were also several larger projects with nationwide impact, many of which were oriented at young people.

The OK ‘98 campaign was huge, as it was the key to returning democracy to Slovakia. What is more, its success inspired civil society in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe to, where it helped to redefine post-communist democracy, including Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. In the Slovak elections in 1998, turnout hit a record 84.24 percent of voters, and despite the fact that Mečiar’s party still outnumbered the united opposition at the polls, he was not able to form a new government, being unable to find partners to enter into a coalition with him. The democratic opposition took power, Mečiar and the HZDS went into opposition, and a new socio-political era in Slovakia’s modern history began. The new government, an anti-Mečiar coalition led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, the chairman of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia, SDKÚ), pursued critical economic and political reforms. This first Dzurinda government enabled Slovakia to enter the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to begin accession negotiations with the EU, to close virtually all chapters of the accession acquis within a relatively short period of time, and to present a strong candidacy for NATO accession.

These civic campaigns and the democratic change they contributed to also altered the relationships between the NGO sector and the newly elected government. This was reflected in the adoption of changes in legislation regarding the civic sector to bring it into line with international standards. Thus the foundation law was changed to provide for legal entities that typically either donate funds and support to other organizations, or provide the source of funding for its own purposes. The legislative framework for civic associations and for non-profit organizations providing public benefit services was also changed to make it more transparent. Under its provisions, a civic association cannot be a political party, political movement, business organization, church, religious community, trade union or state body; civic associations are associations of members, and the citizens of Slovakia have the right to form civil associations (unless they are militant in nature or aim at restricting the rights of other citizens). Further, a not-for-profit organization providing generally beneficial services is a legal entity, whose primary activity is to provide such services under pre-determined and equal-to-all-user conditions and whose profit may not be used for the benefit of its founders, members of its bodies nor its employees, but must be used to secure public benefit services.

Despite the described successes, many observers point to the fact that the independence of Slovakia did not lead to a mass emergence of modern NGOs. The expectations of many that the introduction of democracy would help to increase civil society’s impact on political decision-making and consolidate civil society as a key to quality control over decision-making were not met. Nevertheless, many foreign foundations, organizations, funds and governments contributed to building the basis for citizen participation and democratization in Slovak society. The support of these institutions enabled the establishment of national NGOs in the fields of human rights, protection of minorities, women, ecology, etc. Furthermore, the process of accession to the European Union was a major factor in Slovakia’s democratization process, as it forced the government to enact various democratic measures.

Another important piece of legislation which can be used to promote citizen participation and strengthen the position of citizens in the decision-making process is the Freedom of Information Act. Under this law, anyone can demand information from state institutions, organisations, municipalities, individuals and legal entities financed by the public budget. The adoption of this law was the result of a campaign on the part of NGOs that lasted more than a year. In 1999, a group of NGOs established the informal Civic Initiative for a Good Freedom of Information Act and launched a campaign to get the national parliament to adopt this act. They were motivated by the many negative experiences of citizens and NGOs in trying to access information from public authorities and municipalities. They further hoped to improve the transparency of the public administration.

Civic Initiative identified nine principles of a good Freedom of Information Act. These principles were based on the experiences and needs of civic organisations, standards applied in other democratic countries or documented in international agreements, as well as the experience of introducing such acts in neighbouring countries. The most important principle became the motto of the campaign: ‘What is not secret is public’. The initiative gained the support of more than 120 NGOs representing over 100,000 members. The campaign was also supported by various media and dozens of journalists. A draft of the act underwent two rounds of public consultation and was made available on the Internet.

The first official responses from the Parliament and the government to the proposed bill of the civic initiative were negative. In the meantime, the civic initiative began to forge its campaign in an effort to gain stronger support from citizens and to influence members of Parliament. Thousands of citizens sent postcards to the Speaker of the Parliament to get him
to support the draft of the bill. Media supported the campaign. Campaign leaders were invited
to attend parliamentary committee meetings and to negotiate on the draft, where they pressed
for the general principles outlined in the draft to be accepted as the basic minimum for a good
law. Legal experts from the civic initiative continuously analyzed the amendments of
members of the Parliament and prepared arguments for and against. Before the final reading
in the Parliament legal experts prepared an overview of amendments specifying which could
be accepted and which would jeopardize the quality of the act.

On voting day, activists welcomed members of Parliament entering the building in T-
shirts with the motto of campaign ‘What is not secret is public!’ and observed the voting
procedure. In the end most members of Parliament approved the bill as proposed by civic
initiative. The Legislative Branch of the Office of the President announced several
reservations to the bill, but after consultation with experts and the leaders of civic initiatives,
the President signed the bill into law.

The above-mentioned pieces of legislation help local and national initiatives to involve
people in public planning processes and decision-making. The campaigns described
demonstrated cooperation among NGOs and the ability of the sector to act coherently.
Looking at the evolution of the sector, civil society gained in strength and capacity through
these experiences, even though its social and political impact remains limited. It is
elective to observe that there exist activities between government and civil society which
seek to establish mutually positive relations. This shows that the public sector is slowly
becoming aware of the importance of the role of civil society. At the time of this study was
written, Prime Minister Iveta Radičová had in her advisory committee several people with
NGO backgrounds, and the government established a civil society development department,
which should provide and improve conditions for the development of civil society, promote
active citizen and NGO participation in governance and coordinate the creation of a concept
for the long-term development of civil society in the Slovak Republic. These developments
give hope that civil society will be able to further evolve and strengthen its position within
Slovak society over time.

Nevertheless, NGO capacity for participation remains limited, especially in relation to
human and financial resources, even though the legislative framework and the attitude of the
government is often facilitative. One very positive aspect of the environment for NGOs is the
possibility for private individuals as well as legal entities to assign 2 percent of their income
tax to not-for-profit organisations. In 2002, approximately 4,000 NGOs were registered
for this mechanism, and their number rose to 10,000 in 2011.

Civil society is active in promoting democracy, non-violence, gender equality, tolerance
and environmental protection, but there appears to be a lack of activities in the fields of
transparency and poverty eradication. While transparency is observed within the sector itself,
the importance of transparency as a principle has been less promoted in society as a whole,
and civil society is not seen as successful in trying to hold the state or business sector
accountable. Watchdog activities on the part of civil society have been able to make public
cases of corruption at all levels of government, but they are rarely able to mobilize people to
demand change.

As described above, the last 15 years in Slovakia have seen major transformations in
power relations. Adding to these has been a process of decentralization, from national
government to local governments and newly established regional bodies. Along with
decision-making power, the responsibility for income and expenditure are now in the hands of
regional and local authorities. Slovakia has three levels of direct elected government. On the
national level representatives are elected directly to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, and the President of the Republic is also directly elected. On the regional level, there are direct elections for municipal and regional representatives. At the local level, members of city councils and mayors are directly elected. Citizens are aware of these changes and their impact on their life. However participation, although generally higher than prior to political transformation, still remains weak.

Among the few long-term initiatives with a systematic approach to supporting local citizens’ participation in independent Slovakia are two programs that have been funded by US institutions since the mid-1990s. ACDI/VOCA helped to establish *Vidiecká organizácia pre komunitné aktivity* (Rural Organization for Community Activities) or *VOKA*, which has been deeply involved in rural development all over the country since its foundation.\(^8^2\) VOKA has implemented a wide range of rural development programs, which promote and support democracy, equal opportunities, freedom of expression, citizen participation in planning and decision-making, to develop voluntary participation in community activities and to defend citizens' interests at the local, regional and national levels.

From 1996, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) provided direct support for the implementation of its community organizing project in Slovakia.\(^8^3\) Fifteen community organizers were hired and trained, and set up community groups mostly in urban areas all over the Slovakia. One of the results of this project was the establishment of *Centrumb komunitného organizovania* (Centre for Community Organizing) or *CKO*.\(^8^4\) Both of these organisations are supporting local initiatives of people in their communities, helping them solve local problems and actively participate in planning and decision-making processes on the local level. While few international donors remain active in Slovakia and international funding for their work has become less available, their activities and those of the local groups they have supported are highly appreciated. *VOKA* is the national partner for the Centre for Community Work, a Czech NGO that organizes the international competition ‘About people with people’ to promote cooperation among citizens, NGOs and local governments, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment in the Czech Republic.

The efforts of others were directed towards the development of local community foundations in Slovakia, the first of which was established in Banská Bystrica in 1994, followed in 1996 by community foundations in Prešov, Trenčín and Pezinok. The Open Society Foundation (OSF) provided these initiatives with three-year matching grants aimed at building their sustainability. Even with the support of OSF, the involvement of local activists in the three cities was the key to making the foundations’ operations successful. Between 1996 and 2003, another eight community foundations were established. During that time, substantial financial support was provided by the OSF and by the *Ekopolis* Foundation, which made grants with funds provided by the U.S.-based C.S. Mott Foundation.\(^8^5\)

In 1999-2000, Slovak community foundations launched local fundraising campaigns. Until 2004, it was possible to raise some funding from OSF and Ekopolis, and funds were

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\(^8^2\) ACDI/VOCA stands for Agricultural Cooperative Development International and Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance, a U.S.-based NGO supporting economic development and cooperative practices; detailed information is available on the ACDI/VOCA website. For comprehensive information about the Slovak Rural Organisation for Community Activities, see the VOKA website.

\(^8^3\) Information about the National Democratic Institute is available on the NDI website.

\(^8^4\) The online presence is at Centre for Community Organizing.

\(^8^5\) Detailed information on community foundations in Slovakia: Association of Slovak Community Foundations. For detail on the funding partners: Open Society Foundation, Ekopolis Foundation, and C.S. Mott Foundation.
also available from some foreign donors. These funding streams have since been wound down and today local fundraising is key to Slovak community foundations’ ability to function and run activities. In 2003, the Association of Slovak Community Foundations was established to strengthen their capacity, foster their development and to help create partnerships with donors and different institutions. The Association brings together organizations which play a unique role in their communities: community foundations accumulate in-depth knowledge of their communities’ needs; in partnership with their donors they fund initiatives which strive to meet these needs and disseminate ideas of local solidarity, self-help and voluntary involvement.

On the governmental side, the responsibilities of local authorities and the legal provisions for citizen participation have expanded significantly in recent years. It is also generally expected that local government should work closely with citizens in order to effectively address local needs and issues, and citizens have several possibilities to participate in local decision-making processes. Municipalities have the right to call referenda and they have to call a referendum if they receive a petition from twenty percent of the eligible voters of a given municipality. The results of such referenda are legally binding. More than half of the eligible voters in a municipality must participate in order for a referendum to be valid, and the decision is accepted if it obtains a simple majority. Further, citizens have the right to participate in public meetings organised by municipalities and in meetings of the municipal council. Any citizen may take part in the discussion and voice their opinion the issues under discussion. Citizens also have the possibility to submit a petition, a complaint or a proposal to municipalities or any other state body.

Despite the fact that the legal framework for the participation of citizens in local planning and decision-making exists, real participation remains rare. According to one expert, “... effective participation cannot only be measured in terms of the ability to satisfy the citizen's need to speak out. Effective participation is not just letting someone say something or submit opinions or attend meetings. [...] To be effective, participation must initiate a reaction or response showing that the information was heard.” In the opinion of this author, citizen participation in Slovakia remains something of a one-sided process – in which citizens build their capacity to be a responsible partner in participation, only to then be ignored or put off by local authorities. While there are examples of good practices through which citizens and local governments cooperated successfully and effectively, these are not common, they do not take place at the initiative of local authorities and cooperation is often not sustained.

In sum, this brief overview already points to a mixed record of citizen participation and civil society involvement in democratic decision-making in Slovakia. On the bright side, civic engagement has scored some remarkable successes in challenging government, decentralisation has brought politics closer to ordinary citizens, and the legal framework guiding participation has gradually expanded and improved. Less encouraging are a continued reluctance of political decision-makers to respond to impulses and ideas coming from citizens, the continued vulnerability of many civic organisations, and generally low levels of citizen participation in public affairs. How, in these conditions, citizens and civil society engage on the local level shall be examined in more detail through the case studies.

Slovakia has a set of laws to provide access of citizens to information and allow citizens to participate, but many times those instruments are used only by big national NGOs to deal with nationwide problems. "The Government of Slovakia is aware that an open approach of

public institutions towards citizens is the best way to secure public trust in the state and its institutions. One of the principles to change the culture of politics is the transparency in the decision-making processes enabling public control, including access to information and disclosure of information". Citizens in their local communities do not have experience with such instruments and they have to learn what and how they can use them so as to be part of the decision making process.

Three study cases will show different ways of citizens’ participation. The first case presents the initiative of seniors from Sasova neighborhood in Banska bystrica, Slovakia. In this case the Center for Community Organizing Slovakia cooperated with the Community Center, established by the City, with the aim to support an initiative of a group of active citizens. It is a case of cooperation between an NGO and local government when both sides see reason in the participation of citizens in public life. The second case presents the campaign of citizens from the neighborhood in Zvolen, Slovakia for a new sidewalk next to a school. The case study presents 4 steps of community organizing and campaign which challenged activists to come up with new ideas for their strategy and campaign, further challenging local authorities and giving citizens a sense of their power. The third case presents the process of social services planning at the city level in Banska Bystrica. Planning was initiated by the City officials, but they hired NGOs to manage the process and include, beside the officials, the service providers and service users.

Case Study No. 1

Cooperation in the community - Community organizing in the Sasova neighborhood, Banska Bystrica

This case study will illustrate participation of seniors and young mothers, the two groups of people usually considered as less active in public life. Seniors lived the majority of their lives in regimes where criticism of public officials was not possible and they still hesitate to criticize authorities or demand their rights. Young mothers are also a group considered too busy with small kids, without time to participate on public life and campaigns. The case study will present two neighborhood-based, separate campaigns of those two groups from one community.

The community working with the aim to increase the public participation in the neighborhood Sasova in Banska Bystrica is using community organizing methodology. Methodology was developed by American sociologist Saul Alinsky in 1940 and is nowadays broadly used in USA to empower members of disadvantaged communities. Since 1996, the Center for Community Organizing in Slovakia trained dozens of community organizers and helped people in urban communities to commonly identify issues and solve them.

Community organizing is a process by which people are brought together to act in common self-interest. While organizing describes any activity involving people interacting with one another in a formal manner, much community organizing is in the pursuit of a common agenda. Community organizing generally takes place under the umbrella of a non-profit organization that reaches out and engages people to action. Often-times, paid or volunteer community organizers help to advance the process of community organizing by facilitating a process that:

- Identifies a problem or set of problems;
- Identifies a solution;
- Clarifies a set of objectives;
- Develops a strategy and an approach;
- Develops leadership from and relationships among the people involved;
- Mobilizes public support;
- Launches a campaign.

Community organizing is usually focused on more than just resolving specific issues. Organizing is empowering all community members, often with the end goal of distributing power equally throughout the community. 88

88 Adapted from Tools for Radical Democracy by Joan Minieri and Paul Getsos, Chardon Press, 2007

Community meeting is a method used by the Center for Community Organizing Slovakia and supported groups bringing together a cross-section of viewpoints, in a place to exchange ideas and information. In a successful meeting, a variety of active participants are brought together, information and opinions are shared, volunteers are identified and goals and action plan frameworks are established. Community groups are encouraged to have community meetings as inclusive as possible. Number of participants and quality of meeting depends on the invitation of different age and interest groups like the youth, the elderly, teachers etc. It is also important to include representatives from churches, businesses, civic organizations, and if necessary city authority. Organizers of such a meeting should be sensitive to its diversity. Many communities have ethnic, cultural, and social differences that should be considered.

Community organizing in the Sasova neighborhood, in Banska Bystrica, was started by community organizers doing interviews with the citizens using the door to door technique to reach the widest sample of citizens living in community. The purpose was to find out the main problems of the neighborhood and to identify the specific issues in citizens’ interest to work on and start to participate in order to find and propose their own solutions and pursue them at the local level. About three hundred interviews have been done through the months of January and February 2012.

Parking, vandalism, broken and damaged (in winter also icy) sidewalks, lack of activities and possibilities for the youngsters, no public lightening in the little forest/park in the middle of the neighborhood, low security, too few police guards, no space to go out with the dog freely without the dog-lead and polluted neighborhood by the dog-waste are some of the problems mentioned by the interviews. After completing door to door phase, the community organizer invited interviewed people and other citizens for the first meeting in the Community center in the neighborhood to choose the most important issue and propose potential solutions for it.\(^{89}\)

As the interviews were going on in the winter months mainly, most of the elder citizens defined the frozen sidewalks as the main problem for them. The second underlined problem in the Sasova neighborhood was the waste pollution. This is a general problem for almost each neighborhood in Slovakia and it was chosen to work on due to group of young mothers at the community meeting. They came prepared, ready to identify certain spots polluted by waste. They specifically pointed to playgrounds used by parents with children in their free time.

The actors in the sidewalks issue were the seniors and the general public. Those most involved in the water pollution matter were the parents – mothers gathered in the Mothers Center, the association of young mothers with kids up to 3-4 years old. They wanted to get the whole range of the citizens involved, including the dog-owners, to start the discussion to find a solution that would be acceptable and positive for the majority of the citizens. On the other hand, there are the actors like the city council members and city officials who could make decisions and implement measures to solve problems.

\(^{89}\) The Community center is a facility of the City of Banska Bystrica. It was opened in September 2011, a result of previous cooperation between the City of Banska Bystrica and the Center for Community Organizing. They have been developing the idea of a community center in Banska Bystrica since the beginning of 2011. The city and CCO even have a formal memorandum of cooperation to jointly support the work of the Center.
In the spirit of strong cooperation with the Community Center (CC), the Center for Community Organizing (CCO) established two hours of morning time once a week to be scheduled for the senior ladies to meet. One of the key elements of community organizing is the trust, trust between organizer and citizens, in this case also trust between citizens and the CC and the CCO. To build initial trust and attract seniors, CCO organized morning meetings with a cup of tea and cake that one of them brought for the session. They were discussing organizer’s findings from interviews and their problems in the neighborhood. They defined the main issues to work on. The icy and damaged sidewalks were one of them, along with requiring the second room of the Community Center to be kept for the community purposes.

II. THE PROCESS

Many community organizing groups in their effort to balance power in community (to empower citizens, to include citizens in decision making processes) have to confront local authorities. This is the usual way of community organizing done with citizens groups supported by the CCO. In case of Sasova neighborhood CCO in cooperation with Community Center is using more cooperative approach to deal with authorities. The aim is that through cooperation between authorities (city council members, city officials) and citizens, citizens’ participation in public life increases, planning and decision making of local authorities is under closer observation. If those processes are transparent and open for citizens to participate in, the decisions made by authorities are more likely to be accepted by the majority of citizens, because they have a chance to participate and raise their concerns and comments during the process.

Once citizens defined the first issue – that of the sidewalks – and seniors became leaders in the campaign, they had a series of planning meetings to identify specific solution and tactic to use. The group of activists developed a strategy which included sending the letters of approximately 10 citizens to the City Hall, Department of local roads and utilities maintenance, with their personal experiences how they got injured on icy or broken sidewalks, collecting signatures for a petition about the terrible and dangerous state of the sidewalks.

The petition was later delivered to City Council and the Department invited activists for a meeting to identify most broken and damaged sidewalks. At the meeting, one of the seniors presented the issue accompanied by the pictures justifying the bad situation on the sidewalks, limiting the possibility of the seniors and elder people to go out of their homes. They identified damaged, broken or icy sidewalks they need to be repaired/cleaned up properly from the snow or ice. The issue became broadly discussed by members of the city council and they invited the group to give a testimony during the City Council meeting. Complains and proposals were taken into consideration and promised to be solved.

In order to raise the attention about the issue of waste, increase information and educate the people about the topic, the parents from the Mothers Center proposed the “flag action” – using yellow flags indicating waste, including broken glass or dog excrements around the neighborhood that are a danger for their children playing at the playgrounds and the grass fields. The action was happening regularly at least once a week for several weeks before the summer. Activists were pointing out the waste and they spoke with other people to explain to
them the problem and invite them for the meeting with the City Council members and a dialogue session, where they could propose solutions and a way to communicate.

III. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The primary result of this process is the dialog and the communication with the city representatives itself and the fact that the citizens realized that they could try to solve their issues on their own. Secondly it was an improvement in the living situation that would be visible and therefore encouraging people to act more and get involved into the public issues.

The expected effect of the cleaning of the sidewalks will be visible only during the next winter period; however reparation of some sidewalks was scheduled for this summer. During the summer of 2012, on regular meetings with members of the city council, the citizens of the Community Center had the opportunity to evaluate the progress in sidewalk repairs. The citizens are monitoring situation and they are willing to act to get more attention again if no significant improvement of the sidewalks condition is better by autumn.

These issues and the whole process of its completion in cooperation with the city representatives made the even the older generation (usually very passive in terms of the citizen participation and skeptical in agitating for their own issues) understand that when the right and specific action is taken the results can be achieved. During the sidewalk campaign, seniors become more aware of the role and responsibilities of members of the city council and the different Departments of the City Hall. They experienced change in their demand for better sidewalks; they learned that without their active participation the situation would have remained the same. They gathered new skills like organizing petition, preparing themselves for meetings with members of the city council or officials, making presentation at the meetings. Because they learned how important is to communicate and challenge local authorities, they became regular participants in meetings of city council members with citizens in the neighborhood.

Because activities of seniors increased in several different ways they asked the City Hall to provide an additional, bigger room for the Community center to have enough space for their activities. They continue having regular lectures and presentation on different topic, “tea mornings”, video watching and other socializing activities.

In Sasova citizens and authorities are now more aware of the importance of citizen participation and with this aim the Community Center and the City Council organize the meetings that give them the opportunity to meet on the regular basis and talk together about the most important issues in the neighborhood and the possible solutions. These meetings are held to overcome the barrier between the citizens and the city council members. The beneficiaries are on the both sides – the citizens have the opportunity to get attention to the problems they want to solve in their neighborhood, propose their solution and get the answer with the possibility of the realization of this solution. The members of the city council can get the real idea of specific issues and the proposed solutions that satisfy the citizens. The expected outcome is mutual cooperation and a higher rate of citizens present at the regular quarter meetings.
Case Study No. 2

Community organizing – A campaign for a new sidewalk

In 1996, the US based organization National Democratic Institute started their community organizing program in Central Slovakia. Community organizing is a process by which people are brought together to identify community problems and they take action to solve those problems. Community organizing has 4 steps (this case study will demonstrate them through a real campaign):

1. Systematically listening to residents and citizens in order to select and prioritize problems and visions;
2. Researching to identify potential solutions;
3. Solve these problems and achieve these visions through self-help approaches and/or engaging key government and other institutions through negotiation, using pressure when necessary;
4. Forming and building groups which empower their members for long-term involvement in community issues.

One of several community organizing projects of NDI in Slovakia started in 1996 at the neighborhood informally called “Zapad” (“West”), in the western part of Zvolen, a town with 45,000 inhabitants in Central Slovakia. The neighborhood is a typical “socialism style” neighborhood – lot of high residential block of flats on a small area, a lack of services and high apathy among the residents towards public life. The first buildings were built there in early 1970 and the last just before the Velvet Revolution in 1989.


Through more than 200 door to door interviews and personal meetings community organizers gathered a wide range of community problems. On the following community meeting, participants identified a few of them as most important issues to solve. During interviews many mothers mentioned the almost non-existing sidewalk to the elementary school. It was badly constructed and after a rain or snow melting it was under the water and children would get wet crossing it on their way to school.

From those more than 200 interviews the organizers learned about several problems in the community but the sidewalk was mentioned almost by each mother. The issue was deeply felt mostly by mothers of children from the local elementary school. The neighborhood was young and almost each family has children in school. Additionally, the school was one of the biggest in Slovakia, with more than 2000 pupils.
This was the first step of organizing - systematically listening to residents and citizens in order to select and prioritize problems and visions. The issue was identified by local residents and they knew that it was the responsibility of the local government to build a new sidewalk. The second step of organizing was the first set of tasks for a group of active citizens, which named themselves as the ‘Citizens’ Initiative Zvolen – West’.

After several months, the core group had about 20 people who had not been active before. Even though the issue was mostly identified by mothers, the group had approximately equal numbers of men and women, people of different backgrounds but with same interest to build a better community for their families. Several members of group were teachers from the school. The group was promoted as open for everyone who wanted to do something for the neighborhood. They also build good relations with the members of the City Council.

II. THE PROCESS

One member of the group was an architect and he approached several of his colleagues to develop a detailed plan of construction including a budget. His proposal was presented and discussed with teachers from the school and rest of the members of Citizens’ Initiative. To make it possible to achieve what the group wanted they proposed a “minimalistic” version of the sidewalk. The Citizens’ Initiative communicated with school principal and teachers to get their support and published several articles in the local newspapers to get the support of the public. The principal of the elementary school had tried to get the city to repair the sidewalk, but nothing happened. This was a clear message that if the citizens really wanted to achieve their plan, they had to constantly communicate with authorities, to push them and to monitor the process.

They developed a strategy for a campaign which included not only a long term goal, the new sidewalk, but several mid-term goals like getting public promise from 75% of the city council members. The strategy also identified potential supporters, resource of the Initiative, which city council individual members or committees they needed to reach. Based on this information, the Initiative developed different tactics. They regularly published articles in local newspapers, sent letters to each member of the city council, held meetings with influential members of the city council and officials from several City Hall departments.

Activists learned more about the City Council’s and the Mayor’s responsibilities, the city’s budget and the city’s economic situation, who were the most influential members of City Council, who were the members of the City Council Financial Committee etc. The group was able to get all needed information, the difficult part was that behind official responsibilities there were also political relations between different stakeholders. Political parties and their representatives publicly supported the Initiative but unofficially they hesitated to vote for the budget change to allocate money for the sidewalk.

The group held one big public meeting with the Mayor to get his support even knowing that he officially was not responsible for the money allocation, but he was a significant political figure. The group managed to organize public meetings in a new way which surprised the Mayor and his team. In previous public meetings, the Mayor had been the main speaker and he controlled agenda. In this meeting he sat behind the table with a few local leaders without his team, he listened to 45 minutes complains of parents and teachers and then
the meeting facilitator asked him if he would support the demand of the group to have the new sidewalk by the new school year. After 2 or 3 attempts to avoid giving clear and direct answers he said “Yes, I will support you to have a new sidewalk before the new school year starts”. After the Mayor’s promise, the facilitator ended the meeting. After this declaration, the group carried out a series of smaller working meetings with city employees responsible for planning, constructions, budget etc. to make sure that their plan would be implemented.

Another series of meeting were then held with several members of the city council. Significant local politicians were personally informed about the situation of the old sidewalk and they were asked for support. Each member of the city council received, just a few days before the meeting, a letter with pictures of the water splashed in front of the school. After ongoing pressure from the group on the local government, the government agreed to allocate more money to build not only a sidewalk but also a completely new square.

III. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The campaign lead not only to obtaining the new sidewalk for children, but it significantly helped build an organized group of citizens solving local issues – fulfilling step no. 4 - forming and building a group which empowers their members for long-term involvement in community issues. The successful campaign led by citizens empowered them and gave them knowledge on how to run community campaigns. The same group of people worked together until 2001 to solve different local issues. A new community group was established in 2007, with several members from the previous one.

The initial step was done by the CCO, organizer of the interviews and then supporter of the Initiative in implementing their decisions and plans. The issue and potential solution were clear and easy to understand, which helped to get broader support from citizens. The organizer challenged the Initiative to take responsibility and be active in setting the agenda of meetings, places of meeting – thus the Initiative organized public accountability sessions with the mayor, instead to calling, official groups of 5-6 activists went to his office.

The core group of activist within the Initiative learned how to plan a campaign. They learned that such a campaign is not just several randomly organized events, but it requires open discussion and a planning group, openness towards the community, involvement and cooperation with other citizens, serious planning and knowledge. Citizens learned that it is difficult to negotiate with politicians and authorities, because at first they do not have the practice and skills which their opponents have. They also learned to organize meetings from the planning phase to agenda setting, room setting, they learned how important is for example to have the meeting in their own space, one they know and control.

The strategy also included a focus on publicity and personal responsibility of the city council members. The Initiative tried to publish articles about their issues as often as possible and members of the Initiative met personally, in groups of 4-5, with all the influential members of the city council to get their personal promises to support the money allocation for the sidewalk. Those promises have been mentioned in the media.

Short-term and mid-term results are new citizens’ skills and the new sidewalk. A positive result is also the belief of citizens that they can achieve visible change in their community if they are organized and if they have clear goals and a strategy of how to achieve
it. The full square of people during the official opening was also an indicator that the citizens considered this campaign as theirs and they felt responsible for part of the success. People came to the ‘opening’ of the sidewalk because they came to celebrate their own victory.

A long-term result is that Citizens’ Initiative is still active in its neighborhood. Since 1996 they have achieved several victories, they became a respected partner for the local authorities. They still have to run campaigns as reaction to issues in their community, but they also have been involved in several processes to set policies or rules in different fields. They reached a place where they can be more pro-active and even participated in several local and international community organizing trainings and workshops.
Case Study No. 3

Community planning for social services in Banska Bystrica

The two previous case studies from Slovakia described the method of community organizing and citizens’ campaigns where citizens confront and challenge authorities. The reason for such an approach was the lack of interest of the authorities to communicate with the citizens and to involve citizens in the public life. Often in Slovakia authorities are trying to implement their ideas without consulting with citizens. Through the law, the citizens have some limited possibility to participate in planning and the decision making processes, but mostly that is just a formal process without deep interaction between citizens and authorities. Occasionally however, we can see examples of deep, interactive participation between authorities and citizens.

Community planning is an interactive method to involve citizens and other stakeholders to planning process. This method emphasizes that term community planning is a combination of words - community and planning. In this context, the community is made up of people who live in one place – in this case in the city. Interests, needs and demands on the quality of life for communities often differ but they can be satisfied in conjunction with its other members. In well-functioning communities people discuss their needs and interests; they look for possible resources for their fulfillment and seek a compromise that would at least partially satisfy everyone. Community planning as a process must consider the needs of the citizens, those who may fill those needs and those who provide the resources to fill needs. In the process, important community stakeholders meet and seek a common vision for their community. The specific community planning methodology used in Banska Bystrica was used previously in many cities and regions of the Czech Republic.10


The Social Service Department in Banska Bystrica decided early in 2008 to involve citizens in the planning of social services which the administration should support and provide in the next 5 years. Banska Bystrica is the 6th largest city in Slovakia, with a population of around 80,000 people. The City hall of Banska Bystrica hired the Center for Community Organizing, a local NGO, to manage the process of community planning of the social services. This process lasted from June 2008 until May 2009.

The planning was a process where the community wanted to exit the current situation and progress in the future, which would better suit the citizens of the community, in this case in field of social services. Planning became a journey from the present to the place called ‘the

future’, from the current stage of social services to the stage citizens would like to see, with a higher quality and quantity of social services.

Looking at methods of planning in the social services, but also at community planning as a method allows to process materials for development in different areas of public life at the level of municipalities and regions. This method significantly strengthens the principles of representative democracy by involving service providers and service users to the process of planning of provision of services, so that not only local government decides what and how services will be provided, but also those who need the services. Characteristic features are the emphasis on involvement of all affected, a close dialogue and negotiation and reaching a result which can be received and accepted by the majority of participants.

Local authorities have a large responsibility within social services for people and a significant part of the local budgets goes to service providers for their said services. Community planning for social services is a document adopted by the city council. Because this document sets frames for financial support of needed services, it is critical to have objective, impartial and fair plans based on real needs and possible resources. To have such plans requires involving as much as possible all affected stakeholders – citizens with needs, social service providers, civil society organizations as well as representatives of City.

Within the process we can see three groups of stakeholders:

- service users – people in need, such as seniors, disabled people, young people and young families, but also the unemployed, homeless or the drug users etc.
- service providers – institutions which provide social services to above mentioned beneficiaries – which can be private, profit oriented or non-profit, church based, established by City or Regional Government etc.
- city officials – responsible to ensure and organize services for citizens.

In the past, every year employees of the Social Services Department prepared draft of the budget for services and the City Council approved proposed budget. The plan or vision for services was created only by employees of SSD with limited consultation with service providers established by City of Banska Bystrica. There was no legal requirement to have this process more open for citizens. Citizens had limited possibility to send their suggestion to the City Council during budget adoption. It was the wish of the Head of the SSD to make the planning process more transparent and open which made it possible to have a community planning process in Banska Bystrica. She had learned more about this process in the Czech Republic from partner organization of the Center for Community Organizing and decided to hire the CCO to manage that specific community planning process.

II. THE PROCESS

The planning process was initiated by head of Social Service Department of City Hall and later managed by the ‘Steering Committee’. It used methodology from the Czech Republic, because the social service systems are very similar and it followed formal steps – official approval of the City Council for SSD to organize community planning, regular information about the process for the City Manager and Vice-mayor and final adoption of the
Community Plan of Social Services by the City Council. But more important was the level of the stakeholders’ participation. Their participation was ensured during the whole process from setting meetings, setting general visions but also proposing specific tasks. Preliminary results have been posted on web pages or presented in public meetings.

Three groups of stakeholders have been equally represented in the “Steering Committee” responsible for the overall supervision and coordination of the process. It had 9 members, three from each group of stakeholders. They have been elected during an initial workshop. To ensure equal opportunity for citizens, service users and service providers to participate, the City Hall of Banska Bystrica organized the initial workshop. More than 100 people participated, learning more about the process and its timeframe and they had the chance to sign up to be a member of one of the 5 specific working groups. The working groups have been divided according their target groups (Services for senior working group, Services for children, Young people and young families working group, Disabled citizens working group, Minority working group, Citizens with special needs working group).

Invitations for each meeting of the working groups have been posted on web pages and members of the groups have been asked regularly to also invite other colleagues and interested people. The number of working group members had been slightly growing during planning period. Although the process was initiated by the local authority, soon after being established, the Committee, which represented all interests, supervised and coordinated the process.

The involvement of social service beneficiaries helped them understand the complexity of responsibilities of local and regional governments in the field of social services and budget issues. Service providers learned how to communicate with their clients, to receive feedback and suggestions for their services and understand the needs of specific target groups. The administration learned why it should invest money in prevention programs. One of the key learnings was a necessity to have a functional network of social service providers. Such a network is an effective means of information exchange not just between service providers and beneficiaries but also among all stakeholders.

III. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Final evaluation of the planning process showed several findings:

- the majority of involved actors considered this process as a unique possibility to create transparent and needs-based plans for further development of the social services in Banska Bystrica;

- cooperation of the local government with the well-known NGO has proved to be a good step to ensure trust and cooperation of different stakeholders;

- the process went well and at the end, all the actors evaluated it as transparent and open for all.

The short-term result was to experience a promising practice of interactive participation on the planning process for all involved stakeholders. A mid-term result is the creation and
support of networking, information exchange, regular communication between City of Banska Bystrica and social service providers and the participation of public and private institutions on common projects. The long-term results are a common belief in cooperation among stakeholders with different backgrounds and that common planning leads to more focused social services and more transparent funding.

The formal result of the process, the Community plan of social services, was adopted by the City Council in June 2009. The plan sets a framework for further development of social services. Adoption of plan brought improvement of service provisions, but also led to establishing of a new community service in the Sasova neighborhood – the Community Center.
Belgium
Case Study No. 1

Project Hope

I. THE CONTEXT AND THE ISSUE

In 2011, Brussels could account for nearly 85% of private housing and little social housing for 165,090 residents. In January 2010, the Brussels Region Housing Association counted 39,076 social housing sites of which 35,991 were occupied. There are nearly as many households on the waiting list as there are existing social housing sites. On the 1st of January 2010, 37,825 households were registered on the waiting list. Prices for renting and buying property in the Belgian capital have risen sharply and few social housing sites have been built over the last few years, which has led to lengthening waiting lists.

In 2003, the Maison de Quartier Bonnevie (MQB, the Bonnevie Neighbourhood House) started up discussions around a project that would respond to the problem of lack of social housing in Brussels, particularly for large families on modest incomes. Confronted every day with the problem of inadequate housing, of receiving families in need, who are often not Belgian, and who are appealing for help, the MQB wanted to invest in this cause.

This project did not take shape and was not able to start effectively until 2005, under the name “Project Hope”, with the participation of chosen families and the NPO Coordination and Initiatives for Refugees and Foreigners (CIRE), ending in 2010 with the residents finally buying their property. During these five years, the two NPOs (non profit organizations) guided the citizens so that they could take an active part in the building plan and purchase of their future home. This was done by means of a very encouraging participatory process which continued from conception to completion. For example, they met regularly in participatory workshops and discussed the housing that each person hoped for, in order to create a collective and coherent project.

This project was aimed primarily at migrants or those arriving through immigration as these people have the greatest difficulties in acquiring decent housing in Brussels.

“According to the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight Against Racism, 40% of complaints received regarding discrimination in obtaining housing come from Brussels.”

The ethnic origin of a person is an obstacle when renting a house or flat in the 19 Brussels communes, according to the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight Against Racism and the group ALARM (Action for Accessible Housing for Refugees in Molenbeek). ALARM bases this statement on the experiences of those living in Molenbeek (refugees or people in unstable circumstances) and on a little survey carried out after selecting 250 advertisements for rental accommodation: out of 65 landlords with property to rent, 58% refused to rent their property

to people of foreign origin. However, ethnic origin was not a discriminating criterion in Project Hope, as Belgian families could also take part in the project if they wished. Consequently, the two NPOs wanted to work together in order to alleviate the housing problem for low-income households in Brussels. The main criterion used by the two NPOs to choose the participating families was that of motivation.

Very quickly, the residents realized that building a house for each family was not financially viable, which led to choosing a duplex design. The residents also chose “passive flats”\(^\text{93}\) not only because they are ecological and sustainable, but also for financial reasons. Indeed, this allowed them to obtain several subsidies from the Region, which were needed to complete the project successfully. These buildings are also cheaper to run in the long term, and their construction is one of the least expensive. Triple glazing was installed, there is no heating, and one of the parts of the building is made entirely of wood. In this way, the building integrates the criteria for a passive house, so energy costs are greatly reduced. However, this choice alarmed some families, who did not want a wooden house for fear of fire or termite infestations. Moreover, the idea of living – in Belgium where winters are quite cold and damp – in a home without heating led to two withdrawals.

The project attracted attention from many people, especially from Belgian celebrities such as Alain Hubert, the explorer and environmentalist, who was so charmed by the project that he became its patron. Now that the project is completed, the residents and the NPOs are still very much in demand for giving interviews or tours to groups coming even from France, who are interested in reproducing the experience for themselves.

In order to gain a better understanding of the project, we will firstly be looking at those who took part in it: the families as well as the two NPOs. We will also mention the financial assistance that allowed the project to see the light of day. In a second section, we will see how the participation process played out for the families. If at the beginning this may have seemed like a risky wager, the difficulties were overcome, allowing the families to take an active part in the entire duration of the project. However, the latter remained strongly guided by the two NPOs. In a third section, we will mention the credible success of this project, which has provided more than just access to property for the families. Finally, we will see that the question of social housing is still not a priority for the interests of public powers. Therefore, the role of associations and the solutions that they propose as alternatives to the classic housing model, play an important part.

II. THE ACTORS

The fourteen families of Project Hope

The families that took part in Project Hope did not know one another before the start of the project, but they were all known by the two NPOs: the MQB and CIRE. In fact, they had already taken steps towards obtaining assistance in searching for and buying property, or towards taking part in saving groups. The families did not group themselves together to form

\(^{93}\) A passive building is a building which is heated passively, namely, that it does not include an active heating system such as, for example, central heating. The sun, insulation, interior gains etc are sufficient to maintain an agreeable temperature in the building, even in winter. (http://www.passivhaus-vauban.de/passivhaus.fr.html)
an association, they were contacted by the NPOs. At the beginning, fifty families were selected, then thirty were visited to talk about the project. Finally, sixteen families were chosen to participate in the project. The NPOs took into consideration the motivation of the families, their desire to participate in such a project, and they also took into account the housing in which they were living in order to evaluate the level of healthiness.

The project was aimed above all at large, low-income families, who had trouble in finding housing and who were interested in buying. Families with two or three children also took part in the project. It was very important to involve the families in creating and implementing the project by following the guidelines of the NPOs, as all too often, social housing sites are ill-conceived or do not take the needs of their future residents into account. The idea of this project was to build a sustainable cohabitation by engaging all the participants. In fact, it was imperative that each person should be consulted and that decision-making should be a collective activity. Indeed, as the families would have to eventually become owners, it seemed essential that they would not decide to leave their housing as soon as it was built, or during the construction phase. Their involvement in the management and decision-making was therefore one of the component criteria of this project.

The NPOs sought to create some diversity. It was in this way that fourteen families, of ten different nationalities and of low income, came together within an association of “Hope” and met regularly over four years. Before this project, the majority of the participants had never or had barely been active in such an area as the right to housing and citizen participation. Moreover, they had no knowledge of passive building, not knowing the concept.

The Bonnevie MQB and CIRE

The two NPOs work in the social sector, mainly with people who have immigrated and who are on low incomes. They are particularly interested in the question of housing and in the difficulties faced by these families in finding accessible housing. The MQB works towards a better quality of life in Molenbeek-Centre, one of the poorest districts in Brussels. It works with residents by developing an integrated form of social work. It gives advice to help people buy property in the district. The NPO started Project Hope after noticing that large, low-income families were finding it impossible to locate housing in the district at accessible prices.

The MQB, due to a lack of financial and human resources, contacted CIRE and asked if they could work together, namely on the project for collective solidarity saving. “This idea takes its inspiration from the principles of the African Tontine, where each family makes a monthly contribution of a fixed sum that is decided by the group. Collective saving works like a working-capital fund which can be used by the different families in the group, one after another, as an advance on the installment required upon signature of the preliminary sales agreement. The Walloon Housing Fund is a privileged partner and participates in this project, on a case-by-case basis, by including the sum of the installment already paid in the mortgage and returning it to the collective saving group on the day of signature of the certified bill of sale.”94 The two NPOs had already worked together on this type of project and they both had the same sensibility and approach to social housing policies. Indeed, the MQB and CIRE are both aware that there is a lack of social housing or affordable housing in Brussels. Besides the recurring cases of discrimination towards foreign nationals, it is very

difficult for large low-income families to become home-owners. Therefore, the two associations wished to put this project into action.

CIRE, established in 1954, is a coordinated pluralist structure that brings together 23 different associations (Amnesty International, Caritas Internationalis, the Walloon branch of the FGTB (General Federation of Belgian Labour), the social service of socialist solidarity etc.). Its objective is to discuss and act in a concerted fashion regarding the questions linked to the problematic of asylum seekers, refugees and foreign nationals.

The two NPOs accompanied the families for the entire duration of the project. This involved four people in total (two people per association). They were there to encourage the families, to make them participate, to explain things to them whilst making sure that each person understood the challenges and the major decisions that needed to be made. They monitored them in a collective and individual way. They organized not only themed workshops to train the participants (on topics such as co-ownership, passive housing etc.), but also regular meetings (at least once a month, sometimes once a week during the hardest times). Their timely and personal investment was significant.

III. THE PROCESS

Financial assistance

Project Hope was aware of the financial means of the families. A collective solidarity saving group was set up by the MQB and CIRE, so that the families could pay the installment of 10% upon signature of the preliminary sales agreement. In order to do this, the families set about saving together, all paying in the same monthly sum and thus being able to use the group’s savings one after another. The loaned amount had to return to the communal pot within a short period. This project received numerous forms of financial support with direct subsidies and grants being awarded to it.

With regards to direct subsidies, the Housing Fund (FDL), funded by the Brussels-Capital Region, is an autonomous cooperative association which aims to help low-income families to find housing. It allowed the fourteen families to benefit from social loans at very attractive rates. These families will pay back their loan to the Housing Fund in installments at 2%, in other words, at a monthly rent of a little less than €700. However, in order to benefit from these advantageous loans, the two NPOs had to carry out some political lobbying to lower the rate of VAT from 21% to 6%. At the start, the Housing Minister for the Region did not want to agree to this reduction, but it was finally made after completion of the project. The Minister then put in an appearance at the inauguration of Project Hope by coming to cut the ribbon, which led to thoughts of attempting to politically exploit the success of this achievement. In fact, when actions were taken to launch the initiative, the political powers were not particularly inclined to commit themselves, whereas at the end of the project, once the risk had passed, they appeared much more engaged.

The role of the FDL was significant: it was the project's foreman. It took care of buying the land and construction; it launched a tender for choosing an architect and contractor, and also monitored the progress of the building site. Moreover, as the land was within the perimeter of district-contracted land (a regeneration program of the district initiated by the Brussels-Capital Region), it therefore saw its price drop by a quarter. The FDL was thus able
to buy the land more cheaply from the Molenbeek commune, the land’s owner. Finally, the federal government supported the project financially within the framework of the large town policy.

Regarding the grants awarded to the project, two can be cited. The first is that concerning the appellation “exemplary building”: the residents were able to benefit from financial support granted by the Brussels Institute for Management of the Environment (IBGE) within the framework of this call for proposals. Since 2007, the Brussels-Capital Region has been organizing calls for proposals with a view to giving value to and encouraging the construction or renovation of “Exemplary Buildings”. “Their objective is to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve very good energy and environmental performance within a reasonable budget. These projects were carried out thanks to financial support from the Region amounting to €24 million. In 2007, the Brussels Region still had no passive buildings. Following the calls for proposals, the surface area of passive housing in Brussels should reach 160,000m² by 2015.”

Project Hope also received a grant for being “passive housing” - through the IBGE once again – which allows passive or very low energy housing which is newly built or is being renovated to obtain a subsidy. In total, this project benefited from 25% public support and subsidies. Without this, it would undoubtedly not have seen the light of day.

Progression and challenges of the participatory process

At the start, a project aiming to allow families on modest incomes to become homeowners did not appear to be an easy task. Therefore, the project had to take into account the incomes of the families so that the latter would be able to pay back their loans. To make these families participate, in the long term, in the construction of a passive building was not any easier. Indeed, ten different nationalities, whose mother tongue was not French, had to work together. They did not have the knowledge required to construct a passive building and the majority had never – or hardly – been active in such a participatory context.

The families were guided by and worked with the MQB and CIRE, as well as with professionals. In this way, experts, such as the architect, the engineers or other external parties, stepped into the participatory process to explain certain technicalities. Their arrival was useful above all for the residents and the coordinating associations who were not mastering the technical aspects linked to passive housing, sustainable development, and life as co-owners, etc. In fact, the arrival of specialists allowed the technical side of participation to be improved and to allow some residents to acquire a certain level of expertise in a particular area. In this way, the latter were able to have a better understanding of the challenges of construction or cohabitation, and they were able to explain them to the other residents. The citizens were therefore able to make decisions with a better understanding of the context.

The families made a long-term commitment to this project, which started in 2005 and was concluded in 2010 by the purchase of their property. This therefore involved a significant investment – both of themselves and of their time – on the part of the residents. The participation of the families in Project Hope proceeded from an MQB initiative. It was with CIRE that the MQB set up the participatory workshops in which the families took part; public

organizations did not play a part in this area. It is important to note that the role of the families took shape little by little, it was not clearly established at the beginning of the project.

As the MQB and CIRE wanted to create a “tailor-made” project for the residents, they wanted the latter to be able to participate as fully as possible in its design. Therefore, the residents were invited to participate in every stage of the project. They were involved in financial choices, calls for subsidies and in meetings with political bodies. They met the FDL and not only participated in the purchase of the land, but also in the housing design workshops. However, as the housing being built was a passive building, conforming to complex standards, certain technical details were not submitted for approval from the residents – the architect and engineers made these decisions on their own. When the building was being constructed, the residents were also able to go, one after another, to the site meetings which took place once a week, but they were not able to intervene in decisions, nor to take the floor: they could only attend as observers.

Over the course of various participatory workshops, the families drafted a list of specifications which expressed their desires regarding their future housing. The Hope Association, bringing the fourteen families together, was also established in order to discuss the type of housing that the families hoped for. A President was nominated by the families to represent them in meetings where numbers were restricted, with the NPOs or with other organizations. At the meetings, it did happen that the families would not be in agreement, but these disagreements were never total. For example, the most difficult time in the project was that of choosing the flats, as several families were interested in the same one. The NPOs finally found a compromise so that each family was satisfied. Generally speaking, the families did not leave meetings without having settled their differences, as the NPOs and the Hope Association President facilitated negotiations and played the role of mediators during collective decision-making.

Regular meetings with representatives of the families took place, sometimes in plenary sessions with all participants, sometimes in restricted numbers with the FDL. The idea was to show that the residents were involved in the decision-making process and that they wanted to take part in it, even influence it. Before each meeting with the FDL, the families and the two associations, CIRE and the MQB, would meet to decide on a joint position; this would allow them to maintain coherence and credibility when engaged in the meeting. The associative coordinators played an important role in the relationship between the residents and the FDL. The latter did not always wish to recognize the citizens (especially during the construction phase) and was opposed to some of their suggestions (making a study room in the basement, installing a water supply outside the living areas). The relationship was sometimes very tense and the decision-making weight of the FDL (as foreman of the project) allowed it to assert itself. A certain air of malcontent arose from the situation, but it did not swell and finished by fizzling out. In spite of this, once the building was constructed, the families recognized that the architect had responded well to their expectations, thus proving that joint decision-making in the design and construction of the building had been effective.

Not all the residents participated in Project Hope in the same way. Those with jobs were less available than those affected by unemployment or those registered with the Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS). While some families took part very enthusiastically, others had to be more pushed to do so. Moreover, the residents barely interacted outside of the framework of the planned official meetings. The residents organized a party after the land was bought in 2006 and when the building was inaugurated in September 2010. But for the most part, their relationships were limited to the project. Some residents had a “leader” role in
meetings, but this remained fairly limited. Consequently, it was considered important, even essential, that the coordinating associations organized the families to lead the project to a successful outcome. Project Hope, initiated by the Civil Society (the MQB and CIRE), took on an ascending, or bottom-up, form. Participation by the families was therefore encouraged and guided by the associations.

The relationship between the two associations and the families was based on trust, as in the words of the MQB and CIRE associations: “We felt an enormous sense of trust on their part, which was sometimes frightening as it was also an enormous responsibility.” The families relied enormously on the organizational and informative abilities of the two coordinating associations. This led to the creation of a certain amount of dependence, even submission to the guidance of the coordinators, as some of the residents explained to us: “The MQB said that we had to stand on our own two feet, as it was more work for them. It was up to us to take responsibility. At the beginning, that was difficult, we didn't accept it willingly, we didn't need to be left alone, but it was beneficial”; “CIRE and the MQB were like 'mummy and daddy' and we were the baby. At the beginning, even if we had everything we needed, we still wanted their help to guide the family”. However, the meetings (date, place, frequency) were arranged by the residents to suit them. The coordinators played the role of accompanier but almost that of a trainer as well (especially at the beginning) when the time came to explain the challenges of the decisions that needed to be made. Moreover, some of the families did not have French as their mother tongue, so the two NPOs had to be attentive and make sure that the subjects tackled were understood properly, so that participation was not feigned. The associations also played the role of mediator and coordinator between the residents and political staff during the project's progression (with the burgomaster, ministers etc.). In the end, the two coordinating associations and the families – by supporting the same ideas and not competing with each other – achieved a relationship of deep trust.

IV. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Project Hope had a significant impact on the families. Indeed, it produced a double phenomenon. First of all, the citizens took part in an exhaustive participatory process, from design to completion of the project, with a strong principle of joint decision-making. This led them to developing their own autonomy, their ability to analyze a decision-making process and eventually their ability to influence those making the decisions. Secondly, the fact that they became home-owners helped them with their insertion into society, as several of them were able to find a job following this stabilizing experience, or, in the words of one of the MQB coordinators: “The impact of Project Hope on the families was very strong, so many of them improved their social situation, many of them found work. They organize a lot of things, it's incredible! I would never have believed it at the start. They also managed tensions well after moving day, and this was thanks to this experience.”

The residents met political staff (the burgomaster, the deputy mayor, ministers), through the MQB and/or CIRE. The families took it in turns to be present when there were meetings with the elected representatives. Indeed, whilst the residents found the political and decision-making processes quite hazy at the start, it became clearer and more understandable, to the point where some residents learned how to influence political decisions on a group level: “The most active residents know deputy mayors, the burgomaster, the environment minister.
They know how you can influence a decision. Before, this was all abstract for them. Now, they have had the experience of what it means to start from zero,” explains the MQB project coordinator. The impact of starting a dialogue with the burgomaster, the deputy mayors or even the ministers of the region has been extremely important. Since participating in Project Hope, the citizens are known and recognized. Indeed, they have acquired significant credibility with local elected representatives and public powers. They have also acquired firm recognition from the Burgomaster of Molenbeek who, since the project, has asked them to organize events in their district, awarded them subsidies for their Majorelle garden, etc. The residents thus receive regular encouragement in their new initiatives and activities, and they obtain subsidies more easily thanks to the established relationship of trust and credibility.

The residents have also been in contact with other associations. Firstly with ALARM, who put them in contact with the MQB – who work mainly on the issue of inadequate housing for those who have just arrived in the country or who are living in dangerous situations; then with the La Rue (The Street) association after Project Hope. It was the MQB that put them in contact with the NPO La Rue, with the idea of helping them to get involved in their district and – according to the residents – to allow them to continue receiving guidance, even if this second partnership did not really work: “They did not completely let go of us. They wanted to attach us to the NPO La Rue but we understood that they did not want us. So we decided to manage on our own, we only need advice.”

Following on from Project Hope, it could be said that there has been some sort of phenomenon of empowerment amongst the citizens. Not only have they learned to support a project from start to finish, but they have also learned how to influence decision-makers. They command more authority. The families also have an objective, to change “Hope” from being a de facto association to a de jure association that will continue to lead activities for the district community. However, some residents did not want to continue with their commitment within the association and preferred simply to be co-owners. Others have also developed their awareness and participation in defending the right to housing (about five families out of the fourteen are still active). These more engaged residents are trying to forge links between residents in the district, or are giving information to people seeking decent housing about helpful organizations and the procedures to be followed. The project’s website96, which has been run up to now by the MQB project coordinator will now be taken on by the residents: “I have been taking care of the website, but that should be changing as of now. Often it’s a lack of time, it’s quicker if I take care of it. But now Fadel (one of the most engaged residents in the project) is going to do it – his son is showing him how.”

With regards to links between the families, this project has developed contacts as well as the joint management of co-ownership life. Even if this was not easy at the start, the citizens now know how to manage themselves without the intervention of the two accompanying associations. Living as co-owners has already created some tensions, so three residents were nominated as mediators to try to solve problems, and that has always worked up to now. Some residents also wanted to invest in the community in order to revitalize it. In fact, as their moving into the area has caused some jealousy and misunderstandings (eggs thrown at windows, insults etc.) on the part of their neighbors or other people living in insanitary conditions, the residents wanted to engage in dialogue and communal activities. For example, they have created a communal garden with the neighboring building – the Majorelle garden – thanks to community subsidies. They have also worked towards beautifying the district

96 Project Hope website: http://espoirmolenbeek.blogspot.be/
(flower gardens instead of rubbish dumps, for example) and towards creating social relationships between the neighbors (through neighborhood parties, for example). The Hope association also works with other associations for the right to housing and has a plan to create a community restaurant. Some residents are also “ambassadors” for other future residents of passive housing: they explain to them what it is like living in this type of housing, train them and pass on their experience on this topic.

**What place is there for social housing on the political agenda?**

Project Hope, in allowing low-income families to become owners of a social and passive building, appears to be an interesting and promising initiative in response to the lack of housing in the Belgian capital. However, the public powers seem to be dragging their feet in considering this issue as a priority. Indeed, “the proportion of public housing with regards to the total housing stock is relatively low in Belgium: 8% in comparison with the 17% European average.”

Moreover, it is estimated that there are nearly 38,000 households on the waiting list for social housing, which is higher than the number of housing sites currently occupied (about 36,000 in 2008). This means that for each occupied housing site, there is more than one household waiting. Doubling the amount of social housing would not even be sufficient to satisfy demand. “Some people even estimate that the waiting list could be twice as long as it is now, as many households that meet the criteria for housing do not even bother to start on the administrative procedures as the wait is so long (up to ten years for a large family...)”.

With regards to increasing the capacity of the public housing stock, the objective of the Brussels Government was to reach 15% of quality housing under public management and for social purposes in each commune by 2020, which corresponds to the creation of 35,000 homes over ten years.

“The announcement is ambitious, but on the ground, it is taking a while to become a reality. The reason behind this is not necessarily a lack of financial means, but rather an unusual administrative burden and limited capacity for execution: public market procedures that are too slow, a cacophony of stages for renovation procedures (87), a multitude of people involved in the decision-making process, a lack of qualified personnel…”

Moreover, the Region wanted to prioritize renovating the existing stock, instead of new construction, so several public housing societies, who are already on a tightrope do not dare to invest in constructing new buildings. This translates into weak concrete progress: only 1,805 households were able to enter social housing in 2009, which means that at this rate and if the data remains constant, it will take about twenty years to house all the households currently on the waiting list.

The role played by the associations in this area therefore seems even more important. Indeed, the associations that have invested in this issue are numerous. As an example, we can mention the establishment of the Ministry of the Housing Crisis association, created in 2006 to discuss a joint action that would solve this problem. This ministry is made up of three Brussels associations: 321Logements (321Housing), Chez Nous/Bij (Our Place) and the

98 Ibid.
100 BRANDELEER, C., *Art.cit.*
101 DOULKERIDIS, C., Complete report of speeches and oral questions of the Committee for Housing and Urban Renovation, Brussels-Capital Regional Parliament, meeting of Tuesday 05 July 2011.
Rassemblement Bruxellois pour le Droit à l'Habitat (Brussels Assembly for the Right to Housing). The Rassemblement Bruxellois pour le Droit à l'Habitat works all year round so that housing remains at the heart of the concerns of candidates and newly elected representatives. It was in this way that numerous associations wanted to move on from waiting for change by proposing solutions themselves, giving alternatives to classic housing.

On a European level, millions of citizens are affected by access to decent and affordable housing. On the initiative of Mr. Alain Hutchinson, member of the Brussels-Capital Regional Parliament, the Committee of the Regions (the assembly of representatives of local and regional powers of the European Union) adopted at the end of 2011 a notification of initiative proposing to “prepare a true European agenda on social housing”. This topic does not lie directly within the capacities of the EU, however, Alain Hutchinson estimates that each month, the EU passes legislation in areas that have a direct impact on social housing policies, such as essential funding, state assistance, social services in the general interest, etc.

Finally, it is clear that Project Hope, which has allowed fourteen families to become home-owners, is a success. However, such success would not have been possible without the work of the two NPOs – the MQB and CIRE – and the subsidies received. Indeed, Project Hope benefited from 25% public contributions. If this project seemed achievable, when looking at the facts, it did not seem as though it could be repeated in the same way as it required a great deal of subsidies and investment – of time and manpower – from the families and the NPOs. On the other hand, the project seemed to be a starting point from which to lead other projects. It is in this way that the Community Land Trusts (CLT) project developed. This is an initiative by the civil society and several associations who decided to come together around this new plan. The idea of the CLT is to separate ownership of the land from that of ownership of the building by making the land the property of the CLT. The objective is to create affordable housing for people on low incomes. The public powers have reacted positively to this proposal and Christos Doulkeridis, Secretary of State for the Brussels-Capital Region in charge of housing, has lent his support to the project.
Case Study No. 2

Lire et Écrire (LEE) – Read and Write

The association Read and Write (LEE) was created in 1983 by Belgian workers, Christian and Socialist movements, who believed that each person possesses the inalienable right to education and that learning to read and write is therefore a right for all. LEE aims to promote and develop literacy for those in the French community who have had little or no education and who wish to learn how to speak, read and write in French. Three main missions were established: to attract the attention of public opinion and public authorities regarding the problem of adult illiteracy and the urgency of analyzing the causes of the problem and finding solutions for it; to increase the number of places for training adults in the French community who are illiterate or barely literate; to find the means for creating structures that are most likely to contribute to the development of a decent level of literacy in the French community.

This association is part of the movement for permanent education. According to article 1 of the decree of 26 August 2003 regarding support for associative action within the field of permanent education, permanent education aims to encourage “the critical analysis of society, the stimulation of democratic and collective initiatives, the development of active citizenship and the exercise of social, cultural, environmental and economic rights with a view to individual and collective emancipation of the public by promoting active participation by targeted areas of the populace and cultural expression.” Permanent education therefore aims to support the expression and exercising of a critical, active and responsible citizenship. The creation of the network, anchoring itself in this willingness to encourage participation from LEE students, allows them to develop a critical view of education in Belgium and to emancipate themselves.

In the Walloon-Brussels French community, 10% of the adult population is illiterate. There is a real sense of discontent amongst the students – particularly among those who originate from Belgium – towards the school system, as although they went to school many years ago, they left without learning how to read or write; they felt rejected. In the case of the other nationalities in Brussels, there is not such discontent towards school as the students did not go through the Belgian school system.

On the other hand, these same students (from the immigrant population) feel other frustrations, especially linked to the discrimination of which they are victims when seeking employment, housing, etc. The students, not knowing how to read or write, are excluded from society. Participating in the network allows them to feel like citizens who can change things at their level. This allows them to understand that phenomena are not hitches and individual phenomena, but are actually social phenomena and that they can overcome them.

For a greater understanding of a student network such as the citizen initiative, it seems interesting to ask questions about how it was established and how it works. What does student participation bring to it? Do the public powers take the students' demands into consideration? How far does the network expect to go, what is its future? There are numerous questions and, in this case study, we will try to answer them to the best of our ability.

The network was set up following various events. In 2007, the student association *L'illettrisme, Osons en Parler* (Illiteracy, We Dare to Talk About It), from the regional branch of LEE in Verviers, organized a forum entitled “Illiteracy, our point of view.” Students from all over Walloon, as well as France and Switzerland, were invited. The idea was to see how illiteracy is tackled beyond the Belgian borders. Meanwhile, LEE was expressing its willingness to support the participation of students on a national and international level. Thus, LEE has been organizing “Student Days” since 2007, where students from different regions have come together. In 2009, three students, one teacher and one LEE French Community teacher training leader took part in an international conference on adult education at UNESCO. All this gave the students the desire to come together and unite their forces, so they expressed their willingness to set up a network in order to invest more, and to participate together in the fight against illiteracy and for the right to education for all. LEE welcomed this initiative, supported it and in 2010, suggested a structure for the network to the students.

LEE is made up of three coordinating structures (LEE French Community, LEE Brussels and LEE Walloon) and of 14 regional and local bodies that promote, develop and coordinate literacy learning as closely as possible with the people involved. Within each one of these bodies, practical activities are run by the students in order to raise awareness of and ask questions about the problem of illiteracy. By way of example, within the *Illiteracy, We Dare to Talk About It* association from the regional branch of LEE in Verviers, two students took part in an internship a year ago at a centre for young people who have fallen out of the school system. They met with young people there and held discussions with them. As for the North-East Brussels branch, they have led activities within the branch itself. In this way, the students have made parents and students aware of the importance of their participation in their child's/children's school meetings. The film “Entre les murs” (“Between the Walls”) was shown and a discussion was held. Awareness-raising activities vary according to each LEE local and regional branch. The former act autonomously.

The creation of the network

LEE students share the wish to learn to read and write. They are all confronted by the problem of illiteracy and the troubles this causes in their everyday lives. Within the LEE French Community and the network, there are Belgian students (mainly from Walloon, from the regional branches of LEE) and foreign national students (from the local branches of LEE in Brussels). The first set has generally gone through school in Belgium but have not acquired the basic skills. The second set is made up of people who have just arrived in the country or who immigrated to Belgium a long time ago; some had a tendency to lead secluded lives in their community, which limited their learning of the French language. In addition, these

102 Noël Van Aerschot, Nebiye Colak and Yves Huysmans
103 Pascale Hilhorst
104 Nadia BARAGIOLA
105 This was an international conference on adult education (Confintea). UNESCO is the organizing authority for this conference, which has been taking place every 12 to 13 years since the end of the 1940s.
106 “Entre les Murs” by Laurent Cantet tells the story of a young French teacher in a difficult school. The film opens the way to a discussion on education, language, adult-teenager relationships or even the selection system that exists in our societies.
people never or barely went to school in their country of origin. The first set therefore have a better level of expression in French and are more comfortable speaking it than the second set.

Within the regional and local branches of LEE, the level of commitment from the students and the practical activities – of raising awareness – vary. The Walloon students invested very rapidly in awareness activities. Indeed, since the training from the LEE awareness department, where the organization suggested to the students that they sit in on awareness organization meetings for the teaching world, social workers and even political elected representatives, the Walloon students – especially those from the regional branches of Verviers and Namur – responded quickly and positively. Since then, they have expressed the wish to demonstrate their commitment, to form awareness groups and to meet outside training hours. In 2005, the students from the regional branch of Verviers decided to form a de facto association (L’illettrisme, Osons en parler) and to meet regularly. The association is very active and the students have recently started on a new poster campaign, in light of the international literacy day which will take place on 8 September 2012. On this day, the students will distribute their new awareness-raising materials for the first time, accompanied by a leaflet giving information on the widespread problem of illiteracy. In this leaflet, the association presents its objectives and gives some advice to facilitate communication with people who have difficulty with reading or writing. The commitment of the Walloon students therefore seems more advanced than that of the foreign national students in Brussels. The two LEE coordinators, the teachers and the students confirmed this. The fact that they are French speakers, that they are more advanced in their literacy and that they have a better understanding of the school system and Belgian cultural references, plays an important role.

As we have previously seen, LEE subscribes to the permanent education movement, and therefore wishes to encourage the participation of students. The proposal made by the students to create a network was therefore welcomed in a positive way. According to a LEE teacher, the network was created “so that the students could participate, could have a place within the institution and could have a say and, why not, make decisions.” The network must unite with the LEE in the fight for improving the right to literacy for all, so that illiteracy disappears.

II. THE PROCESS

Progress and challenges of the participatory process

In order to set up the student network, the different regional LEE branches met with the two coordinators to discuss the structure that they wanted to implement (how many monitoring committees, how many GMs, etc.). The organization in 2007 of the forum “Illiteracy, we dare to talk about it” by the student association of the Verviers regional branch, as well as the significant commitment of the Walloon students in the LEE regional branches, allowed the latter to actively participate in building the structure of the network. The local branches of LEE, as they had been less active when the network was created, played a less significant role. While there are six local LEE branches in Brussels, only the students from the North-East LEE local branch actively participated in how the network was structured. The other Brussels local branches joined the network later and some (three) did not participate.

The monitoring committees allow the students to meet once every six weeks. The students report on the activities that they are carrying out in their regional or local branch;
they talk about external participation in the network (international meetings, forums, etc.); they lead discussion topics and prepare the GMs. The meetings start at 9am and finish around 4pm. Only two students – who are members of student committees in the local LEE branches in Brussels, student groups in regional LEE branches or student associations within their regional branch – may attend. A permanent member ensures continuity and another one changes at each meeting, which creates a rotation system so that each student may participate. The students that come to the monitoring committee have, in principle, a minimal level of expression and understanding of French. Participation in network meetings is therefore not accessible to all students.

The two LEE coordinators prepare the monitoring committees and propose an agenda according to the important points that need to be tackled. Before each network meeting, the coordinators propose some dates and the permanent members of the network make the decision to meet. They then send a letter of invitation, with the agenda, to the students. At the monitoring committees, the two coordinators ensure that discussions are properly understood – they are aware when a message is only partially understood and reword it where necessary. They ensure, in an educational fashion, that all students participate by inviting each one to express themselves, thus helping them to participate in discussion. In order to facilitate discussions, the meetings are prepared in advance in each regional or local branch where students and teachers meet two to three times a month, according to requirements. Making illiterate people or those who are learning the French language participate in the network is a challenge; the coordinators play an important role.

All students, even those who are not involved in groups, may go to the General Meetings (GM) of the network which takes place three times a year. The GMs allow the students to decide on how the network is organized, to choose what activities will be led by the network, to hold discussions and exchange ideas. All students, even those who are not involved in groups, may take part. At the meetings, the different regional or local branches all have the same weight, they take turns to speak and express their ideas and demands. Decisions are made by the students, by common accord, and sometimes a vote is carried out by counting hands. There does not seem to be any competition between the different regional and local LEE branches nor with the LEE structure. However, the LEE coordinators may refuse certain proposals made by the students as they are not always achievable: for financial reasons, because they do not respect the LEE Charter of values, because they are not realistic, etc. In addition, the decisions made by the students are not definitive, the proposals come before everything as the coordinators have to then refer them to the LEE management or the Board of Directors.

The teachers also attend the monitoring committees and the GMs. They accompany and help the students in their progress, they play the role of facilitator, but they do not vote at the meetings. A teacher from a local LEE branch in Brussels mentions the willingness to allow the students their autonomy. Thus, there are generally one or two teachers in the monitoring committees, but rarely more than that.

In 2012, the network chose to work on the theme of the school. In monitoring committees, the students identified three types of people in the teaching world whose awareness needs to increase: pupils, parents, and teachers and school directors. Each group of students, in their regional or local branch, organizes activities in schools to raise awareness of the problems linked to illiteracy and its consequences in everyday life. Some students sit in on organizational and awareness meetings within the teaching world, attended by social workers, substitute teachers, sometimes even elected political representatives.
For example, within the regional LEE branch in Verviers, the de facto association *Illiteracy, We Dare to Talk About It* created a cartoon: “The Illiteracy Rebels”, in which the students recount their own stories and experiences. The cartoon is sent into schools to raise awareness amongst the young public and the teaching world. In the preface, the students address the readers: “You, the adults, the teachers, the instructors... be tolerant. You, the young people, the teenagers... be tolerant, finish your schooling, don't drop out... together we can be successful.” The members of the association tour classes of future social workers and future primary school teachers, as well as upper primary school classes, on the invitation of teachers who are aware of the problematic.

As well as awareness-raising activities which take place in the regional and local LEE branches, the network also carries out its own activities. Thus, in October 2011, five students took part in a week of workshop discussions in Barcelona. They discussed good practices which encourage student participation and the drafting of a European student charter. The network was presented as being an example of good practice in French-speaking Belgium, with regards to student participation.

Students, in addition to the literacy courses from which they benefit within the regional and local LEE branches, may also follow training courses: the so-called *Made In courses*. In order to conduct better awareness-raising activities in the teaching world, the students asked LEE if they could benefit from training. By doing so, they wish to acquire communication skills (knowing how to speak in public, how to formulate a particular message, understanding the procedures for getting in contact with officials etc.) and knowledge about the problematic of illiteracy. Various topics – schools and educational failure, illiteracy in the rest of the world, literacy, why and how – are tackled during these LEE-created training courses.

The *Made In courses* bring a great deal to the students: they acquire knowledge, improve their understanding of the school system, become aware of educational inequalities, make progress in their way of grasping concepts of the world of politics, or even just improve their French, their ease with speaking, etc. These training courses organized by LEE are mixed, which means that they are accessible to students (especially those who are part of the network) as well as to LEE staff. In truth, however, LEE staff have not participated in the *Made In courses* in schools. On a collective level, the *Made In courses* allow students from different regional and local branches to live together for a short week, to hold discussions around different issues, to learn how to understand each other better, etc. This contributes to the students' willingness to change things.

The network, by allowing students to discuss matters amongst themselves, allows synergies to be created and makes the cause of LEE and its students more visible. This network also seems like a school where students will learn how to analyze, how to speak in public and how to construct an argument. There is no other open space for them where they can do this. There must therefore be a lack of spaces where these people can express themselves, and be listened to and understood. The network responds to a desire for self-expression and for being visible at a higher level.

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107The cartoon can be seen: [Http://publications.alphabetisation.be/content/view/114/83/](http://publications.alphabetisation.be/content/view/114/83/), last accessed May 2012.

108 The workshop was organized by FACEPA (Federació d'Associacions Culturals I Educatives de Persones Adultes) in conjunction with the work of the Scientific Committee of students from the European network for adult literacy, Eur-Alpha.
III. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

If in practice it seems difficult to measure the precise impact that participating in the network has on the students, the latter, as well as the teachers and LEE coordinators, have mentioned some changes. Thus, in light of the interviews conducted over the course of this case study, it seems clear that the network has a positive impact on the students in terms of self-esteem and self-confidence. Students acquire autonomy, their social mobility has improved and this allows them to leave their seclusion. For example, one student, after having taken a literacy course for three years and after having been a member of the association “There is no age”\textsuperscript{109}, re-took a professional course and has become a cameraman.

The students are also improving their knowledge of society, acquiring a better understanding of power structures (who has power and who does not) and learning how to implement communication strategies etc. Thus in some regional and local branches, students have worked on some demands for municipal elections in October 2012. Groups of literacy students have participated in this way by drafting a list of demands that was delivered during a meeting – organized by the local Centre LEE branch in Brussels – between residents, deputy mayors and representatives of the Brussels-Capital parties. The topics tackled by the list are education and training, housing, property, security, the environment and social mobility. Within the local West LEE branch in Brussels, students met the local deputy mayor, and an information evening on the elections was organized for the occasion. The student committee also wants to meet municipal authorities and especially the deputy mayor for housing in order to alert him to the unsuitability of the premises used for literacy courses.

All this adds to the students' level of literacy. The familial and convivial nature of the network is also mentioned by the students; they have made good connections and friendships have been born. If within the network some people are more comfortable – they have a better level of expressing themselves when speaking, they have been in the network for longer, etc. - the work of the coordinators and teachers is to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak. Moreover, with time, the differences in level between the Walloon students and those from abroad seem to lessen.

What does the future hold for the network?

Although LEE estimates that 10\% of the adult population of the Walloon-Brussels French community is illiterate, this issue is barely taken into consideration by public policies. In fact, in the French Community, the problematic of adult literacy play little or no role in the fields of research conducted by the formal sector (social support establishments, high schools, universities etc.). These issues were therefore prioritized, studied and analyzed mainly by the informal sector (permanent education, NGOs, libraries, museums, various associations and institutions in the field of adult education etc.), including LEE.

As well as student participation, it seems interesting to question the network's ability to ask questions. The issue of illiteracy, which is rarely covered by the media, does not seem to

\textsuperscript{109} This association brings together students from the regional LEE branch in Namur. It aims to raise public awareness of the issues surrounding illiteracy.
be a priority for the public authorities. The latter seem bothered by illiteracy as it questions the efficiency of the school system in its current form, especially with regards to the French-speaking public. Illiterate people are therefore barely considered by the Belgian political agenda. In the regional and local branches, with municipal elections approaching, students are working with teachers on demands for literacy, which are aimed at the future elected representatives. They want to organize some lunches around the date of the 8th of September – literacy day – to which the candidates will be invited, so that questions can be asked about literacy issues and the measures already taken. In this way, every year on 8th September, LEE tries to raise awareness of the problem of illiteracy, to question the wider public to raise awareness that illiteracy is still a reality. However, in Belgium, where school is free and compulsory up to the age of 16, are citizens aware that illiteracy still exists and that it affects nearly 10% of the adult population of the Walloon-Brussels French Community? This hardly seems likely.

According to the European Union, education, life-long training and skill development are integral to the Europe 2020 strategy for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth. However, if questions regarding adult education and training are on the European political agenda, their main objectives are those of efficiency, efficacy and productivity, which seem far removed from the particular interests of illiterate people. Today, the influence of the network and its ability to ask questions therefore seem limited.

The idea of the network is, above all, to unite in LEE's fight for improving the right to literacy for all and for illiteracy to disappear. Little by little, the network would like to open up to other literacy associations. It was in this way that the “literacy collective” - which organizes literacy courses for adults, both men and women, of 18-30 years of age and above – recently joined the student network. In time, the network would like to approach political decision-makers, but it is still in its initial phases and prefers to advance slowly. If there are demands, the network must first of all strengthen itself and draw up proposals for changing the school system. It must join forces with other organizations working on this issue. It would thus like to meet organizations who are active in this area, such as the members of Aped. This will allow the students in the network to establish a position.

The willingness of the students to increase the network can be especially illustrated by the letter that was recently sent to the directors of LEE. In the letter, the students expressed their willingness to meet with them and to acquire more means in order to carry out their activities. In their opinion, the student must be able to commit to learning without restrictions (a course or meeting sometimes clash, geographical distance can put them off, etc.) and the teachers must be given more means to help students. All this led LEE to question itself about student participation and the role of the network within LEE.

A work-group has been in place since February to discuss the topic of student participation. LEE views student participation as a process that is chosen freely and which leads to personal emancipation. The directors are also asking themselves the question of knowing what place to give the student network within LEE. In truth, however, communication between LEE directors and the students in the network remains non-existent, they still have not met. The position of LEE with regards to the willingness of students to

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110 Aped is the appeal for democratic schooling. It is a Belgian movement of discussion and action created in 1995. It militates in support of the right of all young people to have access to knowledge that brings understanding of the world and to skills that give them the tools to carry out their own individual and collective destiny.
participate therefore remains ambiguous and unclear. This may be explained by the fact that these issues could disturb and question the current operation of the organization (could the student network participate in the management of LEE one day, be a part of the platform in the fight against educational failure\textsuperscript{111}). Maintaining a certain distance from the student network could therefore be translated as fear that the network will gain too much importance and will, in time, want its independence. Indeed, it seems difficult for an organization to sustain independence from a structure that has supported it.

Among the limitations that the student network may encounter, one may also mention the fact that LEE exercises a certain amount of control over the activities led by the students in the regional and local LEE branches. Indeed, if the latter seem to act “autonomously” regarding their commitment and their awareness-raising activities, in practice, the students cannot mobilize on all the issues that they wish to. Thus, LEE has not accepted the students' wish to mobilize against centers for refugees or asylum-seekers. LEE therefore ensures that the students do not stray too far from its philosophy. Within the network, the two LEE coordinators and the teachers may also seem like people who are enclosing the students of the network in a framework, so that they do not distance themselves too much from the organization.

\textsuperscript{111} The platform in the fight against educational failure was set up by the League for the Rights of the Child in September 2003. It is made up of different associations, teaching unions, researchers and urges, among other things, an in-depth restructuring of the school system, in the interest of all its organizations and of society in general.
Case Study No. 3

The Public Centre for Social Action - CPAS (Centre Publique d’Action Sociale)

Local Agenda 21 projects are based on the initiative by the state to spread the concept of sustainable development in society by involving citizens and promoting their participation. The Public Centre for Social Action CPAS (Centre Publique d’Action Sociale) of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert has taken the implementation of such a participatory process very seriously and this case study looks at the results.

In Belgium and more specifically in the Brussels-Capital region the municipalities and the different CPAS can initiate an Agenda 21 (A21) project. The Brussels-Capital region has decided to open a call for Agenda IRIS 21 projects to the 19 communes and CPAS from the Brussels region to encourage them to work out A21 programmes and in this way to develop the aspect of sustainability of their structures by giving them financial and methodological support. Sustainable development is aimed at economic growth whilst at the same time protecting the environment. Growth is thereby taken as a factor within a systemic approach including environmental and social aspects. The objective of sustainable development is the preservation and protection of our natural heritage and its preservation for future generations.

I. THE CONTEXT

The ‘Agenda 21’ is an action plan for the 21st century adopted by 173 heads of state after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. With its 40 chapters this action plan describes the sectors where sustainable development should be applied at the heart of local authorities. “After the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, local authorities have called to go from agenda (inherited from the summit in 1992) to action. The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives ICLEI (now called ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability) responded by developing and strengthening a series of local Agenda 21 campaigns and programmes and by concentrating more on participatory governance and measurable results.”

Unlike the Rio declaration, which rested on relatively generous and open principles for a new form of development, the Agenda 21 was drawn up as a concrete action plan and was adopted by the heads of state after the Earth Summit in 1992. This plan describes the areas where sustainable development should be applied. In certain ways it can be considered as a kind of instruction manual for sustainable development in the 21st century. It contains recommendations for various issues such as poverty, consumption patterns, health, climate, the protection of biological diversity, desertification, the management of agriculture, etc. The

113 Sustainable development was described in the Bruntland report as a development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
different Agenda 21 aspects should be promoted at all levels and not only by political actors. Therefore “the United Nations system plays an essential role. Further international, regional and sub-regional organisations should equally contribute to this effort. The participation of the widest public, of NGOs as well as other groups should also be encouraged.\textsuperscript{114}

Chapter 28 of the Agenda 21 encourages local groups to promote sustainable development at a local level, closer to citizens, making it easier to outline expectations and to legitimise the actions of public authorities. In this sense the local Agenda 21 was introduced as a means of realising sustainable development on the ground. According to the ICLEI the A21L (Local) is “a multi-sectorial and participatory process seeking to achieve the goals of the Agenda 21 at the local level by preparing and executing a long-term strategic plan of action, a plan prioritising the local challenges to sustainable development.\textsuperscript{115}” The A21L is at once a tool, an instrument of planning, an approach, a multi-step process as well as a document of reference for local groups\textsuperscript{116}.

At the European level A21L was really driven forward by the conference in Aalborg (Denmark) initiated by the ICLEI and supported by the European Commission. This European conference of “sustainable cities and towns” paved the way for the signing of the Aalborg charter on 27 May 1994, the manual for sustainable cities and towns in Europe. On the basis of this charter the European cities and towns commit themselves to “seek to achieve a consensus within our communities on a Local Agenda 21.” The Lisbon action plan was signed after the second convention of sustainable European cities and towns in 1996. This plan was designed to strengthen the Aalborg charter and “prepare local authorities for the local Agenda 21 process”\textsuperscript{117}.

In 2004 the Aalborg charter was updated and ten fields for sustainability covering different aspects of sustainable development were made explicit. The local authorities were the true driving force of sustainable development in the EU.\textsuperscript{118} “Over 330 local authorities have signed the Aalborg charter and Europe is currently the continent with the most local Agenda 21 initiatives. This spread of A21L in Europe can definitely be explained by the high number of European urban development networks”\textsuperscript{119}. Among the most known are the European ICLEI branch, the worldwide association of local authorities for sustainability, Energy Cities etc. This large number of networks shows the growing interest of local authorities in sustainable development. Even though answers and also approaches sometimes differ, these networks allow for the exchange of best practice examples.

Through the structural funds European institutions were quick to show their will to maintain the cohesion of both urban and rural areas.\textsuperscript{120} The transition towards sustainable

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{114} http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf, last accessed May 2012.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} POROT V., Mettre en œuvre un Agenda 21 local dans sa commune. Guide de bonnes pratiques, inspiré d’expériences en Belgique et en Tunisie, Institut Eco-conseil, July 2005.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} http://euronet.uwe.ac.uk/www.sustainable-cities.org/lis_fr.html, last accessed May 2012.
  \item \textsuperscript{118} BOUVIER T., Construire des villes européennes durables, Tome 1, Think Tank Européen Pour La Solidarité, Les Cahiers de la Solidarité n°16, March 2009.
  \item \textsuperscript{119} BOUVIER T., op.cit.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} The objective of structural funds is to reduce the differences in the level of development and to promote the economic and social cohesion within the EU. There are four structural funds: the European Regional
cities and towns is anchored in the mark of policies for European cohesion that provide the instruments and financial means to help the regions implement policies seeking sustainable development. All of these initiatives have helped sensitise the member states on issues surrounding sustainable development. It is within this framework that different types of approaches to the implementation of A21 projects have developed.

To answer the call for tenders of the Brussels-Capital region the CPAS and the municipalities must – as laid out in the requirements – integrate a participatory dimension into their A21 project. Concretely this means offering citizens affected by sustainable development projects possibilities to participate. In any case no criteria and no methodology were offered to the project developers. The CPAS was not given what precisely the concept of “citizen participation” consisted of. Indeed, the CPAS was quite free in its choice of approach and could choose between either a co-operative decision-making approach or a more simply informative approach. The Woluwe-Saint-Lambert CPAS chose a more demanding approach to citizen participation and came closer to a co-operative approach.

II. THE ACTORS

The local Agenda 21 project of the Woluwe Saint Lambert CPAS aims to insert a logical way of managing sustainable development in the functioning of the CPAS. This must be done in collaboration with the employees and beneficiaries of the CPAS by implementing a participatory process. Sustainable development is understood in the broadest sense, which is as comprising of a social, an environmental and an economic pillar. As the CPAS’ priority is chiefly social, the focus was put mainly on this aspect.

Fundamentally, the CPAS offers a number of social services and watches over the well-being of all citizens. In Belgium there are many people who do not have sufficient means for subsistence or who are homeless and therefore potentially qualify for social assistance by the CPAS. Every person legally living in Belgium is eligible to social assistance and to a minimum income. To receive such social benefits certain conditions must be fulfilled. Before granting benefits the CPAS determines a person’s income. The CPAS determines which aid is the most adequate regarding a person’s personal and family situation and offers this person the necessary means to fulfil his or her needs.

In 2010 the Woluwe Saint Lambert CPAS answered the call for projects in the region and presented an application to the environment agency Bruxelles Environnement (IBGE). The region received the CPAS’ local Agenda 21 project in 2011 and sufficient funds to start the project were granted. Further funding can be granted during the next two years (50,000 EUR per year for a period of three years) for as long as the CPAS’ regular reports show that it is effectively implementing the different stages of its local Agenda 21 (A21L) project.

In consequence, the institutions involved in this project are the CPAS of WSL, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region AVCB. The Brussels-Capital Region is an autonomous region like Development Fund ERDF, the European Social Fund ESF, the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund EAGGF and the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance FIFG.
the regions of Flanders and Wallonia. Through its institutions and its inhabitants the region of Brussels is multicultural because here speakers of French, Dutch as well as people of numerous nationalities meet.

The CPAS is a municipal public institution offering social services to its visitors. Each municipality has its own CPAS through which it offers social services and assistance with employment for people in need. The president of the CPAS is an (elected) municipal counsellor, and therefore also has a political role.

The AVCB is the Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region. It is an association without lucrative purposes (asbl in French), established and managed by and at the service of the regional authorities of the Brussels-Capital Region. Established in 1993 it developed from the regionalisation of the Union of Belgium Towns and Municipalities. It is composed of three types of members: effective members – the constituent (founding) members, as well as the 19 municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region; adhering members – the 19 CPAS of the Brussels-Capital Region as well as the associations between various of these and inter-municipal associations headquartered in a municipality of the region; and corresponding members – any other people with an interest in the activities of the Association. Municipalities that are members and the CPAS pay a yearly contribution based on the size of their population. Furthermore, the CPAS section of the association has its own management.

Participating NGOs were the Foundation for Future Generations (FGF), Pour La Solidarité (PLS) and the association Wolu social. The FGF was founded in 1998 to fight the great inequalities in the world: between North and South, rich and poor, man and nature, and the future and current generations. Its central objective is the promotion of a new type of development, a concept in need of further clarification in a long-term approach. The Foundation wishes to accompany and contribute to this development, mainly by promoting sustainable development in society. To this end the foundation identifies and supports projects in Belgium, takes into account reflections by social actors and academics and also establishes new approaches for citizen participation.

PLS is a European think tank that participates in the project by offering services based on its expertise in participation. Constantly in touch with European institutions PLS answers to the expectations of protagonists of solidarity in Europe. PLS hopes to play an active role in the development of sustainable public policies, the increase of corporate interest in social responsibility, the promotion of a social economy and the encouragement of citizen participation.

The association Wolu social is an association connected to the CPAS of Woluwe Saint Lambert. Though two separate organisations out of management reasons, their missions are closely linked and both organisations collaborate on a daily basis. They share the spaces that have been given to them. Wolu social is a social asbl with several organisations in Woluwe-St-Lambert: Centre d’Action Sociale globale, the Maison de l’emploi: RAE, l’Antenne Emploi, the Formations informatique and the Projet de Cohésion Sociale.

Participating citizens were the visitors to the CPAS (asylum seekers, pensioners, day care centre beneficiaries, residents of the home for the elderly ‘Antenne Andromède’, those receiving state benefits and so on) and also the CPAS employees. The three key organisers of the project were the CPAS’ A21 coordinator, her assistant environmental expert as well as the external expert in citizen participation.
Both global warming and the protection of the environment are issues society is being faced with more and more through the media. Sustainable development is often proposed as a solution to these problems and the A21 is a part of this approach. Indeed, many of those at the Woluwe Saint Lambert CPAS (both employees and visitors) had already heard of sustainable development. Nonetheless though, many were still not sure what this concept actually meant. Indeed, according to the CPAS expert for environmental issues, many relate sustainable development solely to the concept’s ecologic pillar without regard to its social and/or the economic pillar. For some the concept remains had to grasp and they are unable to relate it to the missions of the CPAS.

Only few of the CPAS visitors were interested in learning about the A21. They hope not to have to deal too long with this institution, for them synonymous to precariousness and having a hard time. Their priority is very clear: leaving poverty behind, or becoming legal. For others projecting a future is more difficult because they are in the last phase of their lives. Only the inhabitants of the home for the elderly and the residents of the ‘Antenne Andromède’ – a small group of pensioners living in a building next to the CPAS and organisationally dependant on them – felt attracted to this project. For the employees A21 is still something new, and some were not really interested in taking part because it means changing their habits and adapting to new models of work.

At the regional level sustainable development is an important issue. There is a ministry for the environment in the region. Several public bodies are dedicated to environmental questions (IBGE, AVCB) and awareness raising events for citizens are organised (Environment day). Moreover, the implementation of A21 projects is supervised by the region that finances and gives those involved methodological support. This follow-up is provided for by the AVCB and the Foundation for Future Generations because internally the region did not count with the necessary competencies. This shows that the region took the quality and the framework of the help offered to the participants in the call for projects seriously. Meanwhile, participation is not the central question in the implementation of A21 projects by the region. Indeed, it was even considered making participation optional due to the problems the implementation of a participatory process caused for most municipalities and CPAS.

The A21 is still a new project for the CPAS which has only just begun to deal with these kinds of questions (sustainable development and participation). Indeed both questions are not a priority for the CPAS and its President is only marginally involved with its implementation. Furthermore, at the organisational level there are certain difficulties, especially with the employees who do not yet understand neither the advantages of participation nor of the A21 project for the CPAS. Many of them see the environment as the only pillar of sustainable development and think this has nothing to do with the CPAS whose mission is social.

The problem of sustainable development and participation

The Brussels-Capital Region hopes to progress in the protection of the environment and sustainability in its municipalities and CPAS to facilitate the transition to a greener economy and a more sustainable society. The risks related to climate change are at the heart of this strategy. Indeed, it has implemented a programme to support the municipalities and the CPAS (‘Agenda Iris 21’), supported by Bruxelles Environment, the region’s environment agency. This support comes in the form of an annual call for projects, with an option to choose
between two types of project: the implementation of a local Agenda 21 project or the realisation of an exemplary project for sustainability. The first such call for projects took place in 2007. In 2010, after three calls for projects, 19 A21 projects (14 municipal and 5 CPAS projects) as well as 9 exemplary sustainability projects were started.

The Region offers its municipalities and CPAS both financial and methodological support. This is ensured both by the FGF and the AVCB. The Region aims to develop A21 and sustainable development projects at the local level, but does not link this with citizen participation in the mark of a co-decision-making process because the extent of participation required for access to financial support is left open.

This way it is the CPAS and the municipalities which choose the kind of participation they wish to implement and can avoid a truly empowering participatory process for citizens. There are no specific controls because binding criteria were not defined. The CPAS has seized the opportunity of the A21 project tender to implement a sustainable approach in its work organisation, workplace design and the services offered to beneficiaries. This has happened thanks to the political will of the President of the CPAS who wishes to see this project implemented. Never before had the CPAS implemented a sustainable approach or a participatory process, neither with regard to its employees nor with regard to its users. It therefore only had limited experience and know-how. Furthermore, only few people really understand the link between the role of the CPAS and sustainable development. The co-ordinator of the project therefore had to – and still does – provide a lot of information and invest a lot in communication. She has ambitiously pursued and promoted participation in the CPAS of Woluwe Saint Lambert. This has resulted in the implementation of numerous mechanisms for participation, for information and to attract citizens and to spur them to become involved in the process.

One of the solutions was to call for experts in two fields: an expert for participation working as an independent contractor and a counsellor on environmental questions who is a salaried employee to implement the A21 project. This arrangement is financially costly and takes up a lot of time (the decision for an extensive participation model entails a large investment both in human resources and financially). This puts in question the viability and the transferability of this example for participation. Indeed, without a loss in quality such a process could not be implemented without sufficient personnel and financial means.

The coordinator of the A21 project of the CPAS of Woluwe Saint Lambert is primarily interested in developing the sustainability of the institution by involving employees and visitors alike in decision-making and in this way improving their well-being. The coordinator has therefore opted to primarily develop the social aspect of sustainable development in accordance with the principle missions of the CPAS. On the other hand, now that funding has been granted the management of the CPAS is less involved in the implementation of the A21 project. Perhaps the call for tenders of the Region was seen as an opportunity to access funding and raise its visibility. The aspects like environment and social well-being seem to be of only secondary interest to the President of the CPAS.

Organization and methodology of the participatory process

At the decision-making level it is the President of the CPAS who holds the political power. Still, the President is only marginally involved with the concrete implementation of the A21 project. Indeed, the power to take decisions rests to a large extent with the Secretary of the CPAS, but also with the A21 project coordinator who can make proposals to the management. The CPAS secretary has only been in this position for one year and is a part of
the A21 project which was not the case for his predecessor. The coordinator therefore has important possibilities to become active.

At the organisational level the coordinator is hierarchically superior to the expert on environment who was recruited at the start of the A21 project. The expert for participation works with them but leaves the coordinator to direct the project. The coordinator therefore counts with an assistant as well as important technical support, which greatly strengthens her legitimacy and efficiency in the implementation of the A21 project. The three jointly decide on organisational and methodological questions, the course of meetings, sessions and workshops and the development of the participatory process. Certainly, organisational frictions (like the separation between the CPAS and the Wolu-social associations, which, although both organisations work closely together still have separate managements) can result in slow decision-making processes. For example when employees are not a part of the same hierarchy this can make decision-making more complex because both managements try to make the other side be responsible for the decisions that are taken.

To begin a participatory process it is enough to present oneself to the CPAS. Information posters are then hung up in the waiting rooms and advertisements are published in local newspapers. Social workers and the expert for the environment also help spread information to spur people to become involved in the process, even after it has begun. Taking part in an A21 process is therefore relatively simple.

For participatory processes involving visitors to the centre the coordinator and the expert for participation have established homogenous groups (elder people in one group, asylum seekers in another and so on), which means that the problems and needs that are then dealt with are shared problems and needs. Then, because really anybody can take part, the maximum group size was limited to ten people. Sometimes sub-groups of 3 or 4 people were formed, particularly with elder people, to make talking and listening to each other easier. Only voluntary participants were integrated into this process, no one was forced to take part.

Questionnaires were frequently used to promote the participation of employees but there were also information-sharing meetings with heterogeneous groups. These meetings were called “structural” (they took place during working hours and were therefore remunerated). At that point it was still easy to become part of the process and the management allowed the coordinator to do her best to ensure the high quality of participation.

At the CPAS of Woluwe Saint Lambert, participation is divided into four stages: information, consultation, coordination and co-management. At the time this case study was written, the CPAS is finishing the second phase and plans to begin the coordination phase in September 2012. However, with municipal elections to be held in October, there is a risk the process could now slow down. The first stage consists in spreading information for citizens and trying to get them involved in the process, to attract them (through information posters, television spots, advertisements in newspapers and word-of-mouth). The second stage consists of consulting with citizens (both visitors to the centre and employees) on what they need to improve their lives and/or work with the CPAS. Here, everyone can say his or her opinion and propose solutions. According to the A21 project coordinator all recommendations were taken into account and gathered in so-called action cards. These ideas were directly passed on to the management without any pre-selection.

Then the third stage – that has not yet begun – consists of organising meetings between the visitors to the centre and the employees, who will divide the visitors into groups and re-discuss the action cards. A priori, the centre’s management is not involved in this stage which
means it is hardly involved in the participatory process at all. This could damage the quality and the legitimacy of the A21 project. The fourth stage consists of implementing the action cards, but the power to decide on and implement these cards lies totally with the centre’s management that chooses which cards to implement and which not. This has lead to a certain amount of criticism by the participants of the A21 process within the CPAS, saying that it is regrettable that the participatory process – implemented with a great amount of attention concerning the quality of the project – is then in the end limited to a “extensive consultation” of visitors and employees. In the end it is the centre’s management that takes the decisions, even though, as the coordinator says, many projects could in the end become implemented due to their high feasibility.

Finally, one could also argue that participation takes place at the level of selecting between different solutions, but not at the level of deciding on the final decision to be implemented. With regard to implementation, participation should affect the form of implementation but with a right of the centre’s management to intervene (which would lead to the same goal, just on a different way). A form of participation in the evaluation phase *a posteriori* could still be implemented.

IV. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The implementation of concrete projects has not yet begun. Nonetheless, to not “try the patience” of participants too much, the coordinator has initiated some first steps. Visible results so far are the energy and environment workshops (organised by the advisor for the environment) for employees and visitors, the improvement of the access ways to the Saint Lambert care centre, and the work that went into making the gardens nicer that also sought to respect the idea biodiversity (beehives, flowers, etc.).

Within this logic of participation, CPAS employees will vote on changes to the CPAS logo. Moreover, CPAS employees have started a community supported agriculture group GSAP (*groupement d’achat solidaire de l’agriculture paysanne*). Although it is true that this does not form part of the A21 framework, the initiative has profited from the participatory and sustainability context and has used this context as an opportunity for development.

The principal beneficiaries of these first results are therefore the CPAS employees and the care centre residents, because for the moment the priority has been the improvement of the living and working conditions within the CPAS. The participants in the ecology workshops organised by the advisor for the environment have also benefited from the “tips and tricks” to reduce their energy consumption.

**A first step towards greater awareness among citizens**

Greater awareness and an improvement of living and working conditions have begun to evolve as much among the centre’s visitors as among its employees. Primarily, employees are now aware of the importance of including the concept of sustainability in their work. For example, an effort is made to reduce energy consumption, small energy efficiency measures are taken and waste sorting was introduced. A system of rewards and punishments with red and green cards has helped create a kind of “model pupil” effect which has helped motivate a certain number of employees.
Among the visitors to the centre this has also translated into greater awareness, although such awareness had seemingly already existed beforehand, especially with regard to the protection of the environment. On the other hand, with regard to participation, certain developments are also visible. Citizens who have taken part for longer then others no longer hesitate to communicate their recommendations and to call on others – shyer than themselves and less used to doing so - to also voice their thoughts. According to the expert on participation, “those with more experience teach those with less”. The greatest increase of awareness was surely among the inhabitants of the care centre, far more used to fighting for their rights and to participation than the visitors of the CPAS or its employees who need to develop these skills within a pyramid-like hierarchy.

In any case, it is not possible to talk of an empowerment of citizens. Decision-making is effectively not collective but delegated to the centre’s management. Furthermore, not all the employees and visitors take part in the process which is based on free participation. If the processes’ source of legitimacy is its current success, then it has not yet reached its full potential to empower those taking part. The process still largely rests on the energy and the initiative of the coordinator and her team that is charged with its implementation and is not yet anchored in the structure through “routines”. Changes to the personnel responsible for its implementation could quickly endanger its success.

**Changing relationships within**

The new CPAS management is more open to dialogue than the previous one in the sense that it itself has initiated a participatory process within the A21 project. Participation and a regular exchange have led the relationship between the centre’s management and its employees to change. Some have realised that an internal reorganisation would be possible. Meanwhile, with municipal elections in October and November 2012 drawing closer, possibilities for such dialogue have decreased.

Otherwise, at the *Conseil des résidents* – the council of residents, a consultative structure installed in the care centre well before the A21 project – dissatisfaction spread all the more easily once the participatory process in the mark of the A21 project began within the CPAS. Indeed, due to bad communication between the *Conseil des résidents* and the centre’s management this structure was already not working well. With the A21 project and the development of participation within the CPAS residents could then communicate certain issues that were causing problems. Although this happened outside of the participatory process of the A21 project, this process has nonetheless created an opportunity for dialogue and for a revitalisation within the *Conseil des résidents*.

Relations between citizens have developed only slowly (between the inhabitants of the care centre and ‘Antenne Andromède’), and there have particularly been changes between employees and citizens. Indeed, many employees now see visitors to the centre differently. Some of them – like at the initiative *Locale d’Accueil* who take care of asylum seekers – who had never really talked to the people they were dealing with, can now better assess these people’s needs and hopes.

Within both groups (employees and visitors) the A21 project produced internal changes in the sense that it disrupted habits. Indeed, these people were not used to being consulted, or to making recommendations. The relationship with the centre’s management is therefore changing, the fear of stating what one thinks is disappearing. Nonetheless, this process only started one and a half years ago and some of the employees have been working in the institution for over twenty year. Deeply anchored habits are therefore only slowly beginning
to change, nothing is yet definite. Obviously, the sustainability and viability of the project also
depends on the results of the 2012 elections in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert.

Conclusions

The two coordinating bodies for A21 projects in the Brussels-Capital Region (the
AVCB and the FGF) have said they are very happy with the A21 project of CPAS of Woluwe
Saint Lambert. They have even decided to use it as an example to help and consult other
municipalities and CPAS on how to establish efficient participatory processes that go beyond
simply informing citizens. With the support of the expert for participation from the CPAS of
Woluwe Saint Lambert, the CPAS of Berchem-Sainte-Agathe has emulated the participatory
methods and techniques developed at the A21 project there.

Additionally, the consultation phase implemented until January 2012 provided
recommendations for all the participating groups. Indeed, the solutions proposed in the
assessment edited by the A21 project coordinator build on all these recommendations. The
positive feedback therefore is hardly surprising and the participants themselves satisfied.

So far no proposal has been refused because the participatory process is still in its
consultation phase and not yet in the coordination phase. Nonetheless, the principal organisers
agree that the majority of proposals can be implemented and are reasonable. Only one
proposal – improving the connection between the CPAS and the centre of Woluwe Saint
Lambert – could need additional funds and organisation. A possible solution could be the use
of shuttles, but this would require the long-term employment of a fulltime driver, which
would entail important financial costs on the long-run. Moreover, some structures for
participation that were not working well (Conseil des résidents, Conseil des habitants de
l’antenne Andromède) are now functioning again, also because the A21 participatory process
has been an example for other members of the centre’s management.

For the moment no strategies to convince the centre’s management have yet been
developed, because it so far has not analysed these proposals. In any case, it would be
interesting to study the reactions and consequences if one of them should be rejected. Indeed,
it would be interesting to see, whether the habits of participants – strongly used to hierarchical
organisations and top-down decision-making processes – will have changed due to the A21
project (increasing awareness and participation). Will they try to renegotiate such a decision,
or will they simply accept and maintain their previous habits?
Resource Centre for Public Participation – CeRe
www.ce-re.ro
Romania

Unit for Social Innovation and Research – Shipyard
www.stocznia.org.pl
Poland

Centre for Community Organizing - CKO
www.cko.sk
Slovakia

Forum Community Organizing - FOCO
www.fo-co.info
Germany

European Think Tank Pour la Solidarite
www.pourlasolidarite.eu
Belgium

Central and Eastern Europe Citizens Network - CEECN
www.cee.cn.net
Slovakia
Local Public Participation in Europe
Case Studies from Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Belgium

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