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ROMA COMMUNITIES IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Brief description of the research

This research was conducted in 2001-2002 as part of the New Europe College Fellowship Program. The methodology employed was qualitative, involving semi-structured interviews with NGO personnel working in development projects in Roma communities. The following four projects were included in this study:

- The "Medecins du Monde Suisse" (MDM) project in the Zabrauti neighborhood of Bucharest (I have been working in Zabrauti since 1997 as part of the UNESCO/MOST project "Gender, environment, and cities"; this case study is better documented as a result and includes interviews with inhabitants of the neighborhood);
- The "Prieteni pentru Hetea" and "Mana deschisa" projects in the village of Hetea, Valcele (Covasna county);
- The projects of the Wassdas Foundation and the Resource Center for Roma Communities in the Pata Rit neighborhood of Cluj;
- The "Institutul Intercultural Timisoara" (IIT) project in Satchinez and Periam (Timis county).

Table 1. Brief description of the development projects

Organizer	Location and type of community	Period of intervention	Activities	Beneficiaries
(Previous : UNDP) "Medecins du Monde Suisse"	Zabrauti neighborhood, Bucharest; Blocks of flats occupied by homeless or migrant families; Mixed community, including Roma of many groups and Romanians	(UNDP: 1996 – 1998) MDM: 1999 – present	Medical assistance Social and juridical assistance (obtaining ID cards, means tested benefits, and other) Homework preparation with school pupilsJob search mediation	All inhabitants of Zabrauti (individual assistance)
"Prieteni pentru Hetea" and "Mana deschisa"	Hetea village, Valcele (Covasna county) Isolated village "Lingurari" Roma	1990 – present	Material assistance (various types of aid) Kindergarten Building a farm for economic and educational use in the future; Religious services	All inhabitants of Hetea (Also: former homeless children from Bucharest, and former drug-addicts from Dordrecht, Holland) (attempts to organize a Village Council)
(Previous: Medecins sans Frontieres) Wassdas Foundation and the Resource Center for Roma Communities	Pata Rit neighborhood, ClujShanty town next to the garbage dump of the city of Cluj; Mixed community of poor Roma and	(MSF: 1991-1997) Wassdas: 1997 – present CRCR: 2001 - present	Contribution to organizing a school for Pata Rit children Accompanying and assisting the pupils Various types of assistance (medical, juridical)	Main target: Pata Rit children Other: Pata Rit inhabitants, depending on available resources

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				(individual assistance; attempts to involve parents attempts to organize community leadership)
"Institutul Intercultural Timisoara"	Romanian families, looking for a source of subsistence Roma neighborhoods in villages of Satchinez and Periam (Timis county)	2000-2001	Intercultural camps with young Roma and non-Roma volunteers. Research fieldwork in two Roma villages, small social work activities	Young Roma and non-Roma volunteers for the project (individual assistance)

The concept of community participation

Community participation refers to "how much is being done by the people for themselves (…) as compared to how much is being done for the people by the others" (Cohen, p. 222). For several decades this has been a keyword in development literature. Participation is valued instrumentally as well as intrinsically and it carries significant emotional weight. As A. Hall observes,

> for many theoreticians and practitioners of development, 'participation' has become an article of faith, a fundamental prerequisite for any successful project or program, and the single most important key to improving the livelihoods of the world's poor (p. 91).

Dependency

Development theoreticians are preoccupied with the risk of lack of self-control inherent in development assistance – dependency. Dependency arises when control over a certain process of need-satisfaction is not in the hands of the owner of the need, so to

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speak, but those of the provider of the good. The person in need is not able to satisfy his or her need by alternative means is, therefore, dependent on that particular benefactor. Dependency may arise from the fact that the beneficiary does not know how to approach the given problem, or does not trust himself to do so alone.

In more extreme cases external assistance can create dependency due to its effects of "moral hazard":

> The possibility of moral hazard arises when people are shielded from the effects of their own actions as when over insurance leads people to act carelessly failing to take normal precautions. Benevolent charity in the form of knowledge-based assistance as well as other forms of charity softens the incentives for people to help themselves (Ellerman [1], p. 19).

Indeed, its purpose is to alleviate need through assistance and, as such, it softens the negative incentives to act. However, it compensates in that it increases competence and self-trust in the ability to act, thus increasing the positive incentives to act. Balancing the two is the art of development assistance.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that the controlling outsiders may not posses the skills, nor even the motivation to foster this autonomy. Development agents may be sufficiently convinced that the assisted persons are incapable of self-determination that they do not attempt to stimulate it. Also, in some cases, a given development agent may simply have an interest in maintaining control over the project beneficiaries for political reasons. The state, in particular, has been accused of attempting to manipulate beneficiaries under the guise of participation in order to obtain political support.

Individual or community participation

A given development strategy or development project may be strategically oriented towards individuals or communities. Accordingly, we can speak about individual or community participation. Individual participation occurs when the individual beneficiary of a given project is involved in deciding what should be done to address his or her problems, contributes actively in the effort to solve those problems and/or contributes to assessing the success of intervention in his or her case. Community participation is a more complicated issue. It involves participation of

community members in managing the development of their community, which is often for the public good and affected by the phenomenon of so-called "poverty of the commons": free riders benefit as much as the contributors, so, why bother?

In defining community participation, we must take into account several questions:

- Who, among the members of the community, participates, and in which way (and at what stages of the project)? It is conceivable that all members participate at all stages (the ideal case); however, in practice it is more frequent that some community leaders participate in all phases, while other members participate only in the implementation and evaluation phase.
- How is participation structured? Is there political leadership of the community that brings it together? For example, there may be a local elite which provides mediation services (such as sanitary or educational mediators), connecting the other members of the community with the outside, that still does not organize collective efforts; how large are the status and role differences between the project elite and the other project beneficiaries?
- What private benefits are enjoyed by those who participate in the provision of the public good? Are there any material rewards, or rewards in kind, or benefits from the increase in status?
- What is at stake in the participation process? What kind of goods are being produced or managed? Participation may appear, for example, within a political process of decision making, within an economic process of resources creation, or within a cultural process of self-expression. These areas are by no means exclusive, but stakes are different. Making a common decision, managing a common property, or making a collective work of art create different kinds of tensions within a community.

Participation: instrumental or ultimate value

Participation brings with it some clear benefits to the development project. Some benefits are instrumental, being derived from the resources and other benefits that contribute to the process; while others are intrinsic, since participation is often seen as the aim of development, not only the means of achieving it.

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From an instrumental point of view, participation is said to offer three main benefits: "efficiency, effectiveness, and increased coverage" (Cohen, p. 231). Participation is a lubricant for the smooth process of development and a guarantee of its sustainability. By participating in the decision making processes beneficiaries are able to direct help towards their real needs. Chances to achieve the project objectives increase (effectiveness) and, as a result, the waste of resources that might arise from distributing unwanted benefits is prevented (efficiency). Furthermore, by participating in the implementation stage, beneficiaries add valuable resources to the project – such as labor, skills, or even material resources. Participation also ensures that project benefits will not be restricted to a privileged few, but distributed among many of those in need (coverage).

Besides these direct advantages for the project economy, there are also other benefits, such as sustainability and learning. By contributing, beneficiaries develop a sense of ownership of the project, and this increases its chances of survival after external financing is stopped (sustainability). If participation is collective, the strength of the community will probably be improved by common action, thus easing the way for further participation. Participation in decision making generates learning. Beneficiaries accumulate experience in decision making, in analyzing and deliberating over a situation. By feeling responsible for the outcome of their own decisions, beneficiaries also learn new lessons from their successes and failures.

In addition to these instrumental benefits, participation is valued in itself. Participation means achieving control over one's own life, which, after all, is exactly what development is supposed to produce. By participating in development projects, people do not allow their lives to be created by outsiders; instead, they use their rationality and creativity for self-determination (Hall, p. 29). Collective participation also comes with certain emotional benefits: "Participation creates a sense of community which gives meaning to human existence and fosters social integration" (Midgley 1986 [1]: 3).

Costs of community participation

"Why participate alongside these people?" Collective participation may enhance the quality of life in some communities, but in others it may force people to interact with neighbors unwillingly. Willingness to interact with neighbors (or relatives) is highly variable and not to be

taken for granted. While some services may be provided within a neighborhood, some people may well prefer to employ somebody to manage them rather than participating themselves in this activity. As employing someone in such cases may not be an option for people of limited means, the desirability of involvement should not be assumed unconditionally. It may be that beneficiaries prefer to be integrated in other, non-territorial communities. Furthermore, authors such as M. Granovetter and R. Burt argue convincingly that in some cases loosely-integrated networks of people from different social positions are much more useful than closely-knit community networks, since the latter only provide redundant information and uniform resources (Portes, p. 6 and 12).

In many poor communities, because people rarely travel outside their own neighborhoods, their communities of interests are also local communities, as their friends or persons close to them also live in the same neighborhood. The degree of territorial isolation of the members of a beneficiary community is a variable that must be taken into consideration when assessing the benefits of cooperation with neighbors.

Literature on social capital also stresses the negative effects that community cohesion can have on individuals, such as restricting access to opportunities for outsiders, restricting individual freedom of community members, excessive claims for support from better-off community members, and downward leveling norms imposed upon the upwardly socially mobile members (Portes, p. 8).

It follows that the instrumental value of participation is relatively easy to quantify in terms of the resources that it provides; however, the intrinsic value of collective participation (as opposed to individual beneficiary participation) is to be established on a case by case basis, based on the structure of the community and the subjective likes and dislikes of the beneficiaries.

The following section describes the experience of pursuing community participation as appears from interviews with development agents.

Challenges in achieving community participation

Community participation is intrinsically more difficult than individual participation, since people must contribute to a public good. This public good may be a direct, indivisible result of the activity of a large number

of people (such as water sources, public toilets, school building or other infrastructure), or may be the by-product of individual activities aimed at obtaining a private good (as community cleanliness follows on from individual pursuit of cleanliness in one's own yard, or a stimulating classroom atmosphere is the result of individual pupils attending school with a desire to learn). There is usually a diversity of interests involved in obtaining a certain public good, as some people value it more than others. For example, parents who are particularly interested in their children's school results, or who are particularly interested in a clean community environment, are more eager to participate in common action (such as meetings, or common cleaning activities):

Parents, whose children do not create problems, come to the meeting; of course they also revolt, they get upset, because the others do not attend the meetings. We asked them what we should do to get the others to come: to get help from the Police, to have them expelled from the community, all sorts of solutions. The problem is that [absenting pupils] divide the classroom – when kids come late, if they are absent for a certain period of time, how will they keep up? This will affect the others as well… there are several complications owing to this aspect. (School Director, Pata Rît)

Collective action can be facilitated by development agents by their enforcing rules to reduce the risks of free-riding and by contributing of resources to increase its efficiency:

These people live from what they get from the town garbage dump, they collect things, and they literally take a part of the garbage dump into the community. So, periodically, someone has to clean the community, as trash is being moved 300 meters away from the dump, and, obviously, they don't take it back themselves. We then have to mobilize the community, provide them with the proper equipment, like bulldozers, etc… they do not do it on their own, as they do not get anything out of it. It is not in their direct interest to have a clean community. There is a fight in that place, as it's not only the community that lives off from the garbage dump, but there are other poor people who come to it every morning. It is a competition, and taking the stuff back is a waste of energy. (A.S., Project Manager, Pata Rît)

Pressure can also be used to overcome obstacles of collective action, by increasing the costs associated with non-collaboration. One project manager analyses a failed action from the following perspective:

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At a certain point we spoke to the mothers because a lot of children skip school these days because they have to take care of their younger brothers, so we decided to do something like this: "we are 10 to 15 women with very young children, two of us baby-sit the 15 children today, tomorrow another two stay with them and so on". But we could never do this, as we did not have a location where we could accommodate so many children. The women did not want this, probably because they didn't trust their neighbors. If I had insisted more, maybe I would have done it. And maybe they would have started communicating and co-operating among themselves, as they would have been forced to, so to speak. And, after two years in this project, I have come to the conclusion that if you do not force them to co-operate, they will not co-operate voluntarily. (M.U., Project Manager, Pata Rit)

For a development agent it is difficult to impose sanctions that would contribute to the further deterioration of the already precarious situation of their clients. Finding mechanisms of pressure that cause no harm is very difficult. Withdrawing assistance may be one solution; another requires the use of threats, and the authority of institutions that are feared, such as the Police:

The Education Law stipulates in one of its articles, I think it is article number 178 ... I do not recall the number ... that parents are obliged to send the children to school. Parents can be punished with a fine if they do not send their children to the mandatory school. So this is another kind of incentive. But the problem was that we had no one to fine nor any address to send the fine to, but they were a little scared that someone might come and ask them questions and so on. And… it worked. Other times, we realized the parents were not coming to the meetings. What could we do, if they did not show up? There were 2 or 3 of them coming, Mr. G. came as well, we managed to get talking, but those were the parents whose children were not in trouble. And then, we started discussing the options: not giving them the allocation was one option. But that was not a solution, I said we should deal them a summons, to invite them to a meeting by written means that would be stamped by the Police as well, so we could analyze their reasons and understand what they want… (School Director, Pata Rit)

Community participation is adversely affected by the lack of community integration, resulting from conflicts, mistrust or structural conditions such as poor mutual knowledge or the constant danger of eviction.

Temporary communities

In communities that are believed to be temporary (as was the case in Zabrauti, and still is in Pata Rit) all stakeholders are wary of investing too much effort in what may be gone tomorrow. For almost ten years, inhabitants of Zabrauti have lived in constant fear of eviction. Attempts were made to demolish the Pata Rit shanty town. It has been decided to close the town garbage dump, which is the source of income for the inhabitants, after a new, ecological dump is opened. The future of the community is uncertain. Apart from lowering the motivation of people to invest in the community, public authorities and professionals also lack motivation to commit themselves to new projects in these areas. For example, fearing the disappearance of the community, the Pata Rit School was unable to hire permanent teaching staff and consequently there has been considerable teacher mobility:

> There have been some problems, because the teachers did not occupy stable job positions, they were afraid. We had some positions that could be filled, but there was always the risk that this community might shatter… So the teachers would come and go, as it was not sure that the classes would exist the next year. In order to make a stable position legally available, you have to make it available for at least 4 years. And then, there is a problem. (School Director, Pata Rit, Cluj)

Internal conflict

Particularly in the temporary communities that are home to people from all walks of life, though also in more stable communities, frequent conflict disables mutual trust and the capacity for common action. For example, quarrels, threats, and forced evictions have been common for a long time in Zabrauti:

> - Do you take the children outside?
> - Yes, we sometimes do. But people are looking for trouble because of the children – the Gypsies want to take our rooms. They are very mean, so it is better if the children just sit here, in front of my door, and play. I send them to bed at 1 o'clock. Then I take them to the park, because people try to get us weaker people out of here and then sell our rooms. (Mother, Zabrauti)

> There are a lot of uneducated people, a lot of illiterates… if you only knew what used to happen here… uproars, fights and so on…. Now things have

settled down, because the Police came, those with masks. These people know no other law than fear. If the masked Police come once a month, then it's peaceful. (Inhabitant, Zabrauti)

The MDM team in Zabrauti has attempted to organize discussion groups and clubs for the women, but failed precisely because of the internal divisions between them, as one social worker recalls:

It is a community, but not a tightly bonded, compact community (…). As it was not a tightly connected community, we tried to transform it into one. We tried to do this in our logical way, by inviting some of the women, by getting to know them better and by convincing them to bring others, to discuss different subjects related to women. We tried to approach subjects of interest to them, like health issues, child nutrition, social assistance or contraception, but also other themes that they found interesting and that we could discuss. Of course, the men could come along, if they did not agree to let the women come by themselves. We did not mind at all. We found this logical and simple. But they did not see it like that. They came at first, some kept on coming, they had some specific issues related to out-of-date rental contracts and problems with the electricity company who kept disconnecting them from the power system. We tried to settle these matters, but those were not the only things we were supposed to debate. We did not manage to bring them together. Why was that? Because, and we understood that later, they were part of different groups, each of those groups had so-called "spies" that used to tell the others what we had discussed, and so no one dared to open their mouths because they knew the others would… so they would never really express their fears, their problems, so we had to try to find a solution. They were afraid of each other. The consequence was that fewer and fewer people came… and practically this was it, they were afraid of each other and they just couldn't speak freely. (Social Worker, MDM)

In Pata Rit the development team also tried to organize a community leadership. The results were modest due to the fluidity and low level of integration in the community:

We tried to create some structures; we even had some elections going, in order to establish a number of leaders of the community. The idea was to try and keep the community under control, as it grew bigger and the conflicts would smolder. We needed someone with authority, someone trustworthy who could be the contact for the local policeman. This person was not necessarily the same as our contact person for child issues. So, we tried,

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but these things don't always work fully. The reason is that this community is so "liquid"; there is no continuity, no influence group. There are some groups that appear and disappear according to temporary needs. And this is the drawback, this is why nothing works. It is not the same situation as in an established village that has been around for 30 or 50 years and which has of its own set of rules. (A.S., Project Manager, Pata Rit)

The first leadership structure in Pata Rit, having nine members, was affected negatively by its large number of members and the consequent dilution of responsibilities. The new structure has only five members. In both cases, the responsibilities of these leaders were not very challenging. For example, they were not allowed to manage community money; instead, they were given responsibility for organizing and mediating communication, with the constant assistance of the development team and public authorities.

You know how it is; it is a very difficult community. There has always been a struggle to prevent social conflicts or epidemics. For as long as I have been working, I tried to build a leadership structure there. There was a record book where all the inhabitants were listed and the "Roma Party" representatives, the Police clerks and I signed this book. We were the ones to approve any attempt to join the community. (O.G., Project Manager, Pata Rit)

Gender biases

Gender can be a factor in explaining lack of participation in two ways. Firstly, women generally participate less in public life than do men. While, secondly, married women also find it difficult to put aside their chores and get involved in extra-domestic activities, particularly if their husbands are opposed to the idea.

In the IIT project a clear gender bias in the participation of Roma volunteers can be observed. Participation by women differed between the two villages; in one community it was only the men who volunteered. The other community could boast two female volunteers – however, one happened to be the wife of one of men included in the project, and the other a student, hence both atypical of the other poorly educated Roma women.

One of the Roma men explained why women from his village would not participate:

-We tried to bring some girls as well, but we have our own rules, you know how it is… and these rules are stricter for the girls. They were supposed to come to Herculane camp and the parents… you know…
-They were worried about the departure, right?
-Yes, especially because it meant being away for 5 days, a week… The parents would say "I would not let my girl go there, where would she end-up?"
-How about the married women, could they come?
-No, at least not those who had children. (G., Roma project worker, IIT, Satchinez)

Roma parents are especially protective of their daughters. This leads, among other things, to restricting their mobility in unknown environments. This is why young Roma girls were not allowed to attend the educational camps in the IIT project and also the educational project from the Strand Colony, Timisoara, as one participant recalls:

-The first year I worked there, Ms. M. organized a trip to Hungary, she intended to take just the children, and not the parents, to Hungary. But the parents opposed the idea with giving a reason. They would not sign; they would not agree to let their girls go. This is the Roma way of thinking… what happens with the girl, what if something happened to her, or to her virginity. They would not let them go, and I could not understand why. Because there is a certain good will, openness towards them. They either opposed or they did not care. Ms. M. always kept on asking for their signatures, in fact for some official statements signed in front of a notary if I am correct, but they just would not sign them… in fact, they were not interested. I believe Ms. M., without even being a parent, actually cared more about the children than the actual parents. Here there should be a change in their mentality.
-Did the trip finally take place as planned?
-Yes, it did, but only after some enormous efforts. I have never seen Ms. M. in such a state; she was exhausted, having to cope with the Romanian authorities on the one hand, and with the parents, on the other. (D.C., project worker, Timisoara)

While this project worker attributes the resistance to a lack of motivation towards education, it is probably more appropriate to understand it in terms of a conflict of reasons, of the priorities in educating a young woman, conflict between the family and the team.

Women are usually in charge of family matters, such as taking a child to the doctor, while men are in charge of local politics, relationships

with outsiders. For example, in Hetea, the most influential heads of families, who are part of the village council, are all men. On the other hand, many conflicts in Hetea are between women and members of the development team (such as the doctor), as it is they that come into face to face contact. As a result, these conflicts tend to be solved less by dialogue and negotiation between the directly interested parties (with a woman, on one side, and, say, the doctor, on the other), but as a domestic affair, only after the husband has been persuaded that his wife has done something wrong. This interaction starts with verbal aggression (between the woman and the doctor) and ends with domestic aggression, without leaving space for the woman to voice her concerns in a neutral space.

Further to this, the gender composition of the development teams influences their interaction with the community. Women assistants tend to work more with women, while men tend to work more with men; appeals for help from beneficiaries follow similar lines. For example, the social worker in the MDM team may report fewer cases of men asking for assistance, as it is usually their wives who try to solve their problems.

Status biases

When a development project is implemented, the first members of the targeted community that get involved (and sometimes these are the only ones) are those who are better positioned to do so in the first place, that is to say: men (for the reasons mentioned above), the more powerful, the better educated and the better-off.

For example, in one village in the IIT project, none of the Roma volunteers actually lived in the poor Roma neighborhood itself; in fact, they lived in other parts of the village and were called the "dissipated Roma", because they lived among the non-Roma, as the following Romanian volunteer recalls:

> None of the Roma people who were involved in the project were really living in the Roma "neighborhood". None of them. They are the so-called "dissipated" Roma people. I can confirm that, as I was there when he came to the neighborhood. Everybody jumped him, asking him questions like "Did you finally decide to drop by? Why did you come now, along with these people, are you afraid to come alone?" This shows a certain mistrust of the people towards him as a leader. To add to this, they had several other leaders who were dishonest, especially when it came to distributing

the humanitarian aid, as they kept part of the aid for themselves – the old
story, you know. (L., student project worker, IIT, Periam)

In Zabrauti, a community which is about 80% Roma, the two
community leaders were Romanian men. (Again on the issue of gender
biases, the "Initiative Committee" that gathered around was also made
up exclusively of men, with only temporary exceptions). These leaders
were also better educated and were competent in dealings with the public
authorities than the average Zabrauti inhabitant.

In Hetea, the community leader was the only man from the village
that was fully literate. Following some events that led to a drop in his
popularity with the other villagers, the team leader constituted a "village
council" that including the most prominent inhabitants. This "village
council" was more inclusive than the previous leadership, though it still
excluded other willing (or simply curious) participants. In order to facilitate
debate within the council (reducing the risk of insoluble fights), this
selection of members was enforced by the team.

In Pata Rit, as we have seen, the development team worked with
several persons as mediators and with leaders with various responsibilities.
Owing to the low level of integration of the neighborhood, local leadership
committees were particularly volatile, and status biases, to the extent
that they existed, did not have much influence on the project process.

Risks resulting from the creation of local leadership

Community participation in decision-making is usually stimulated by
development teams in two ways: the sustaining of public debate and
decision making on specific issues, and the endeavor to institutionalize
community leadership. In the first of these, public debate is normally
realized through collective discussions (and also parent meetings in this
case). These discussions are organized spontaneously and locally in order
to have instant feed-back on an idea or to assess needs. More sophisticated
discussion groups can be organized around specific topics of interest
(such as health, religion, etc.) in various locations.

For structural reasons, full community participation at the decision
making level of a development project is more often an ideal than a
reality. Participation may be more realistically achieved if the number

of participants is reduced such that it includes only a certain category of the beneficiaries – usually the more motivated and more educated.

Development agents may also attempt to create a local leadership that represents and coordinates the other community members in the project (the initiatives in Pata Rit, Hetea, or the initiative of UNDP in Zabrauti being cases in point). The responsibilities assigned to these local leaders are varied and include deliberation only (Hetea), the keeping track of the situation of the inhabitants and mediating communication with outside institutions (Pata Rit), and the management of community money (Zabrauti). However, in many of these cases an integral leadership element is lacking – namely, an institutionalized "relationship between the leader and the followers" (Thapalia, p. 153). Team members are usually engaged in finding or creating leaders in order to facilitate the project activity, as this project worker says:

> *Things would have been a lot easier had it been a traditional community, with a proper leader that we could have talked to. At least, even if we did not agree on certain things, we could at least engage in dialogue … and, as the leader would have agreed to something, the whole community would have acted accordingly. But this was not the case here; there was no one to talk to. (Social worker, MDM Zabrauti)*

Development workers are not overly concerned with establishing leadership accountability and checking that information is circulating transparently in the community. The informal tools of social control within the community are left to take care of leadership abuses and mismanagement; that said, this informal form of social control is not always sufficient, particularly in poorly integrated communities with low levels of educated.

When part of the project, the process of establishing local political elites must be carefully monitored to avoid the unwanted use of newly acquired power. This is particularly important in loosely integrated communities that do not have the necessary power to monitor and sanction their leaders. Establishing leadership in divided communities is a solution that cuts two ways.

Overall, there are three different risks that may affect the leadership process: leadership abuses and mismanagement, generalized suspicion and mistrust (with or without founding), and the risk that leaders will use their legitimacy to obtain certain benefits from the development team

that the team is unwilling to give (for example, assistance in the form of cash, or other material aid).

Leadership abuses of community resources

By way of example, there have been two cases in Zabrauti of building administrators who have run away with community money and many rows about the lack of transparency in spending (though probably not all these were justified in terms of actual wrongdoings).

> - We used to have a woman administrator, but she was not the only one, there were many others. They rotate. They vote for each other like they are in the Parliament, what can I say, they vote for each other, trying to obtain some, how can I say… all they care about is taking advantage of the situation…
> - Did you ever try to get someone trustworthy?
> - There was a Romanian woman once, she was a pure blood Romanian woman, not some interbreed. And she tricked us, she took the money for the electricity bill and she left with the money, so to speak… she had a room on the 2nd floor, she took the money from lots of us, then she left. She installed an electric meter, because we wanted to be like everybody else. We did not want to leave those wires dangling, we felt the need to be normal, because others paid, others were fair, we wanted to live like everyone else, not like this. So she installed an electric meter; people from electricity company came; they installed the cable and put an electric meter downstairs. Some pay their bills now, others do not, this is the way it is around here, our Roma people have their habits… So she collected the money, then I heard she never went to pay the bills, she just kept the money, some said she took it to the bank, but I can't tell you exactly what happened as I didn't have much interest in these things. (Zabrauti inhabitant, woman).

Despite, or maybe precisely because of the repeated problems with administrators who have run away with community money, or spent it without accounting for it, it is very difficult to find a new building administrator. Zabrauti inhabitants are afraid to take on this responsibility. Suspicion of the administrator is constant, with many people are unwilling to cooperate and pay their due contributions, and the general potential for conflict with neighbors is extremely high. Moreover, people fear they do not have the required competence to do the job. Several respondents

from Zabrauti stressed that being an administrator there is well beyond their levels of motivation and capacity:

- Would you agree to be administrator, to do something good?
- I would agree, I would readily agree, but that would mean I would have to know how to read and write… but I tell you this, I would not agree to do it for this block of flats. Not for these people. Because these people are never grateful, no matter how hard you try to do something. People from this neighborhood are never grateful. (Inhabitant, woman, Zabrauti)

- Is it not possible to replace the administrator, what with him having been chosen by the people in the first place?
- Well, the people chose him because they didn't know who to choose. They are illiterate; they can't even read their own names from their identity cards.
- Why don't you try to do it yourself?
- My God, in this neighborhood, there are a lot of bad words and problems. My husband and me, we once tried to help the people, to get 10,000 lei from each of them and to get someone to clean up the trash that used to pile-up. We only managed to get 300,000 lei, because some contributed, others did not. And then they said that I have eaten all the money. Those who came to clean up the trash even sealed these hall windows, so that people would not throw garbage through anymore, but they kept on doing it, as they were too lazy to go downstairs and put it in the trash cans. (Inhabitant, woman, Zabrauti)

- Would you like to become administrator?
- Well, I wouldn't want to get involved in these things… because I know too much and I have a different view on things… and I am not the kind of man to… God forbid, but how the hell could I enter someone's house and say "hey, if you do not pay, I will do this and that… did you hear me?" (Inhabitant, man, Zabrauti)

I will tell you one more thing. About 2 or 3 years ago, I used to be the administrator. But what sort of administrator was I? I didn't collect the money for electricity, running water, but only the administration charges and when I was asking for 10,000 lei, people would protest, implying that I spent the money on my own interest and so on. But the money was not even enough to pay the cleaning woman. And in the last 3 months, even the cleaning woman told them: why do you say such things, the woman gave me money from her own pocket. That was what I had to do. I gave her 30,000 lei once, 35,000 another time. In the first month I contributed

85,000 and I never got it back. I heard people were saying I bought myself a house, so I told them: how come I bought a house but I am still living here? I don't think I would do such a thing. Then I said I wouldn't do it anymore… I would give 10,000 lei like everybody else and that was it… (Inhabitant, woman, Zabrauti)

Structural suspicion towards leaders

People's expectations are formed by those who represent them in one way or another. They believe that leaders are making money out of their positions as leaders and should therefore bring about some tangible benefits. Clarifying the role of a community leader, his actual resources and capabilities, is a difficult process that runs up against the suspicion that leaders abuse their positions and using for their own benefit that which should be used for the community.

By way of example, in the IIT project, the relationship between the volunteers and the other Roma was characterized by tensions owing to the fact that the "leader" position was assumed by the volunteers (though this was incipient, involuntary, or simply suspected by the others). Community members expected some tangible benefits to result from the participation of the volunteers in the program. They were not satisfied and blamed the Roma project volunteers for their not receiving anything:

At first, they thought what we do is just fun, that we only walk around, strolling and having fun, saying, "what are the results, what did you do?" Some even asked us questions. (…) They kept waiting for something from us, even though we had told them right from the start "we have nothing to give you, we are trying to do something and if we can obtain anything, we will give it to you, but if we do not, we do not". We are not like the others who even asked for your shoe sizes… We do not do such things, we do not promise anything, we just try. (G., Roma project worker, IIT, Satchinez)

In Pata Rit, attempts to establish a more powerful leadership failed due to high community pressures on the leader, on the one hand, and generalized mistrust, on the other:

When the water source was brought to the community, there was need for a man or a team that could mobilize the people. But there were very few of them who agreed to take on the responsibility, because as soon as someone assumed a leadership position and was expected to do something, the

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community would immediately pressure him: "it is you the leader, you should do that", or "you are the leader, of course, you get paid, you receive a salary, you should do that". (…) I summoned a meeting to discuss the idea of "what would you like to do", as I told them I was in charge of this project and that I thought they needed water. Then I thought maybe they thought they did not need water, but something else, so I decided to invite them to take part in discussions about what they needed. But we never got to talking about what they needed, as I told them "I will talk to all of you and maybe some of you are really interested in doing something for the community, whatever you feel is necessary. But who would volunteer?" They all jumped sky high, "no, not him, and not him either!". No, I am wrong. After I said that maybe there were some who would be interested to do something, there was a moment of silence and then "I do not want to do it, no, not me" and then I said "for instance, you, Mr. Alexandru, you have so many children, you are skilled in brickwork and so on, you are a grown man, you know a lot more than me, I am merely a youngster, I probably don't know as much as you do". But then some of the people started saying "not that man, nor the other!", so I said "you decide then" and they answered "well, nobody". And in the end, after shouting and… I was not surprised, as I was not expecting a quiet meeting, where everybody spoke in turns. But we had no result whatsoever. (M.U., project manager, Pata Rît)

Conflicts between the team and the leaders

In Pata Rît and in Hetea another risk was more visible: opinion leaders demanding immediate benefits and accusing the development agents of exploiting the community for their own gain:

We have this problem, we want to do something for them, but they tell me: "well, this is what you want for me, but what I want is different" and then we have to find a balance. This also answers the question: "why not recruit people from inside the communities", because, generally speaking, volunteer work in Romania does not function. And this is all the more so in a community where the needs are… the basic needs, I mean, are not fulfilled. It generates a state of… there is another risk: that of favoring someone, that of not being objective anymore, the risk of not having someone objective inside that community. There are several risks. I believe we have unconsciously inherited this principle from Medecines sans Frontiers, that of feeling that it is not good to have someone from the inside that would… On the other hand… their needs are huge; they are like children to us. If you do not succeed in quickly satisfying a certain need, everything you have built in, let us say, months, or even in years, can be

ruined by a drunkard troublemaker, for instance. But the problem is not the drunkard, it is the rest of the community who accept what the drunkard says, and they all start shouting "you have never done anything, you earn money at our expense, and you take photos of us that picture us like in a Zoo" and there is some truth in what they say. It is like… how can I put it? it destroys in a way our work. And these community leaders can become informal leaders, so they can team up against us and blackmail us in various ways. I believe this answers the question… So, we want to avoid this risk… (A.S., project manager, Pata Rit)

Community participation and power relations

As in every field of social life, development projects face multiple issues of power. This is all the more so because "social development, by definition, implies a challenge to existing bases of power and its distribution, and a re-alignment of this power in favor of the powerless" (Marsden and Oakley, p. 53).

On one hand, development projects target communities in need of empowerment, people who are marginal within a broader society. Still, these communities are themselves structured and sometimes divided along lines of power.

On the other hand, development projects are characterized by a relationship between partners of unequal power: the development team in that it controls significant resources, and the community in so far as it is in need of those resources; however, the community is to some extent in control of some symbolic benefits required by the development team: legitimacy, or acknowledgement of the project merits.

The following paragraphs will argue that "community participation" should be understood more in terms of community building and not conceptually restricted to the community of targeted beneficiaries. It will also be argued that participation is an expensive element in the economy of a project due to its requirement of rare resources, such as team commitment, stability and time.

Communities of "what", and communities for "what"?

In its current usage in development, the term "community" refers to a community of location, such as a village or neighborhood. It is sometimes

implicitly assumed that this community of location is also a community of social situation and of interests. However, as acknowledged by much of development literature, people that live together, even when they share a common history, often live in diverse situations and have conflicting interests. Convergence and divergence are both present in community life. The term "community" should sit alongside the term "diversity".

In practice, "community" is a specific concept – a "community of something" – and not a general one. People do share certain communalities, but these vary from one situation to another. They may share a certain common history, a certain similarity of culture, social status, short or long-term interests, a certain common organization, and so on. At the same time, in any given case, those same people will have multiple perspectives and interests. A development project should carefully take into account existing commonalities and their limits, and should make explicit assertions about what sort of commonalities are planned for by the project team.

For example, the people of Zabrauti share a common environment that is heavily polluted by domestic waste. Does it follow that they have a common interest in cleaning this environment? Not necessarily, because that pile of garbage outside is created by inhabitants who dispose of their household waste by throwing it out the window, while others take it downstairs to the garbage can. The former group does not mind the shared pollution that the latter finds unacceptable. Such examples are common.

Common responsibilities and resources

Common property raises difficult issues in all situations – as can be seen in the crisis produced by the collective consumption of electricity in Zabrauti, in the impossibility of mobilizing people to cultivate a parcel of land in common ownership in Hetea, and in the rapid decline of facilities in common ownership (such as water sources or toilets) in Pata Rit or Hetea.

Territorial communities have more commonalities when seen from outside, than when experienced from the inside. It is easier for such a neighborhood to act unitarily in relationship with an outsider, than it is to find common ground when the management and distribution of a particular resource among community members is at stake. In considering communities and the responsibilities they can be entrusted with, Curtis

distinguishes clearly between "*representational responsibilities*, which highlight 'external' relationships with the authorities and *operational responsibilities*, which, for a local body raise the strains and stresses of 'internal' relationships" (Curtis, p. 113). Operational responsibilities refer to the role of the community in the administration of certain resources. These can be "*unitary resources* which must be dealt with on a community-wide basis, and *multiple resources* to which smaller social units can respond" (Curtis, p. 113). According to the type of responsibility and to the type of resource in question, the development team should anticipate a general unity to people's reactions and should devise a proper organizational form to address it. A single representative for the community members may be sufficient for the voicing of general concerns to an outsider, but does not suffice in the management of an important unitary resource (such as the provision of electricity to the community). One or more committees may be needed to manage and monitor the management of local resources, depending on to what extent these can be divided among sub-groups of community members.

Communities and alliances

The term "community" suggests a given reality. In development projects, which are about controlled change, more attention should be paid to alliances, which involve commonalities that are forged strategically. In practice, neighborhood communities are useful not in themselves, but as the basis for collective action, for sustaining alliances between actors with shared convergent objectives.

In development projects, communities of interests, communities of vision and communities of experience are more important from a conceptual point of view than are communities of territory, though their memberships often overlap. Such operational communities need not include only neighbors. Sympathetic outsiders, who are in a similar situation, or who may be willing to contribute resources, are valuable allies.

The policy of seeking alliances with outside partners is nothing new for development assistants. For example, in Zabrauti, the MDM team tried to match job seekers with employers, mediate the relationship between the inhabitants and local authorities, and mediate access to medical care, etc. In Hetea, a popular initiative of the development team was to play the role of intermediary in sales of locally produced

baskets, distributing them to Dutch charitable buyers (though usually it was the young Dutch volunteers themselves who bought the baskets). The Hetea team also mediated in the relationship of the villagers with the Police and the local authorities. In Pata Rit, a notable success of the intervention has been the integration of children into the educational system, while another success – avoiding neighborhood eviction from the garbage dump – was accomplished by means of intense lobbying of the local authorities and by involving the mass-media. Development projects become less local when they try to connect the targeted community with broader society.

Lastly, development team members should be the first to forge alliances (communities of interest and strategy) with community members. "Communities" should be used instrumentally to achieve commonalities, such as that between the team and the beneficiaries, or between beneficiaries and outside actors. Stressing the importance of bridging the gap between the territorial community of beneficiaries and the outside world, Cohen observes that "communities cannot do it alone. While small may be beautiful, it may be insignificant as well" (Cohen, p. 234). The team should therefore "form a liaison between the community and outside institutions, and create a network between similar communities" (Cohen, p. 325).

It must be stressed, however, that mediation between beneficiaries and outside people, such as, for example, the authorities, often involves conflict due to its reliance on three distinct relationships, which may have conflicting stakes: team-authorities, team-beneficiaries, and beneficiaries-authorities.

Team/community participation

One of the main obstacles in achieving beneficiary participation in actual projects is the unstable involvement of the development assistants. For example, when staff members change, the personal interactions with the community members have to be started anew. Also, interaction may be discontinuous and sporadic.

This difficulty was clearly evident in the Hetea and IIT projects. Both, to some extent, saw local development as an intended by-product of the interventions of which the aim was different. In the IIT project, the main objective was intercultural contact. In Hetea, the situation was further complicated by a double agenda: rehabilitation for former drug-addicts

in Dordrecht (who come once a year to help Roma people in Hetea), and rehabilitation of former street-children of Bucharest (who lived for one year in the village farm built by the team). Certainly, there have been many attempts to establish a constant presence in Hetea: six teams in total have been to the farm, have stayed some while, though left subsequently due to the difficult living conditions and/or conflicts with the villagers. Kindergarten teachers, the doctor, and the pastor were present in the village at some time. However, there is still the constant presence of an agent dedicated to interacting with the entire community.

The idea that a development project requires the constant participation of the development agent has been repeatedly stressed by respondents. Informal, personal relations with the beneficiaries, of the kind that can only be based on long-term mutual knowledge, also ease the interaction considerably (this can be seen in Hetea, Pata Rit, and to a lesser extent in Zabrauti).

When the intervening team does posses a sufficient number of people to ensure constant contact with the entire beneficiary community, control of many of the relevant variables is lost. The trust held by beneficiaries in the success the intervention will have in changing their lives declines (though this does not always apply to the agent). The agent becomes a guest, who may or may not be welcome, but loses influence and the capacity to rouse people's interest.

Participation is rarely a cheap solution for the assistant team and demands a lot of effort on their behalf. Participation cannot be achieved as a byproduct of other activities, especially in very marginal communities. Team participation and dedication is essential for beneficiary participation.

"Community participation" as a source of legitimacy

Development projects often choose to target communities and not individuals. The community is seen to be the ultimate source of the legitimacy for the intervention, not the individual beneficiaries. Community goods are valued much more by project teams than private goods, which are supposed to take care of themselves somehow. Projects that contribute to the increase of private property are often not considered eligible for assistance. It is the community and the common goods and properties which are in need for help. Individual voices and resources receive less attention.

Given these circumstances, the community plays an important role in the economy of the project as it must certify the legitimacy of the intervention. A "community of feed-back" must be created if no such thing exists. Project teams work to receive legitimizing feed-back and an acknowledgement of the quality of the intervention from the community. Such a respondent community has to be created to fit the project logic, including some representatives of the beneficiaries, such as leaders, or "typical" beneficiaries.

Though I do not wish to argue against the idea that communities of beneficiaries are in fact the ultimate source of the legitimacy of a development project, I believe that a more useful conceptualization of the source of this legitimacy could come in terms of individual beneficiaries and individual stakeholders, while taking account of their commonalities and their differences in situation and participation.

Conclusions

The concept of "community participation" as it is operationalized in development projects runs the risk of distracting the attention of team from the relevant variables of the development project. The risk most often cited and discussed in project literature relates to ignoring the divergences and conflicts between different members of the community and assuming a unity of interest and perspective, which may lead to disempowerment of some people and empowerment of others. This happens in particular if the development team tries to establish "instant" community leadership or to use pre-existing leaders for project purposes without paying appropriate care to the relationships between the leaders and the rest of the community. Community social control may not be enough to guarantee local democracy and transparency.

Focusing on a territorial community may result in ignoring other potential communities/commonalities of more operational usefulness. Forging alliances between various beneficiaries and other people outside the neighborhood who have convergent interests and useful resources (for example, teachers, employers, journalists, public authorities, etc.) may prove to be more efficient for the project than stimulating local community solidarity and involvement. Development teams are well aware of this and they do this in practice, however this orientation towards network building is often obscured in project analyses by praise of

"community participation". The importance of assistant participation and their involvement in a given community of beneficiaries is also somewhat ignored and probably understated in the project literature, as compared to "community participation". Furthermore, given the importance of private property in the life of all possible project beneficiaries, the logic behind financing development assistance should acknowledge this particular relevance by granting it a conceptual value at least equal to that of common property.

Overall, community participation as experienced in the projects cited in the study has more often than not been concerned with managing conflicts of perspective and interests between beneficiaries and the development assistants. Dealing with conflicts, turning frustrating events into useful experiences and durable relationships, and bridging wide social gaps seem to be essential skills in local development projects.

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