



FOUNDATION DESIRE

For Social Openness and Reflection

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Statements prepared for the session “**The Citizen-Municipal Interface – the Key to More Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanization**” organized within the *Sustainable Development Network Week* by the World Bank, in Washington, on February 28, 2013.

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Discussion topic 1.

Involving citizens in urban services and budgets to enhance social inclusion

Under which circumstances should citizens be involved in planning decisions and/or evaluating services? What are the challenges to keeping a constructive dialogue? Does this lead to more inclusive development? What are the risks?

Participatory budgeting is in its experimental phase in the city of Cluj, Romania.

During the past two months the municipality of Cluj, together with representatives of several local civil society organizations, activists and academics, developed together a strategy paper on participatory budgeting.

This joint work was preceded in 2012 by the calls of the same organizations towards the municipality and towards the by-than candidates for mayorship and for the city council regarding the democratization of local governance by participatory budgeting. The proposal regarding participatory budgeting was one among the many other proposals coming from the “Civic Cluj” movement (<http://www.clujulcivic.ro/>), including claims about transforming Cluj into an inclusive city and about strategies for the territorial integration of marginalized Roma communities from Pata Rat.

A couple of weeks ago, the mayor launched the strategy paper with the occasion of a public city council meeting, and the majority of the local councilors, regardless of their political colour agreed, at least informally, to support this process. Its implementation will start in March, and it includes a community development component targeting the biggest district of the city, and as well as actions that aim at increasing the institutional capacity of the municipality to integrate into its business as usual (decision-making on the base of representative democracy) the processes of participatory budgeting, which involve the citizens’ participation in preparing decisions regarding projects to be run in their district.

One may observe that during the preparation work, but also afterwards, among the participants there were different understandings regarding, among others, issues like:

- (1) the extent to which representative and participatory democracy might be mixed;
- (2) the extent to which citizens’ participation should be coupled with decision-making based on the knowledge of technical experts;
- (3) the possibility to enhance changes in public budgeting without changing the relevant legislation;
- (4) the need that participatory budgeting should assure the empowerment of marginalized groups who usually are not represented in decision-making and whose voice is not listened by decision-makers;
- (5) how to combine the larger urban development plans with the small project ideas/proposals coming from citizens.



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At this point, I would like to raise one of the issues addressed by your question, which is the need to make a distinction between participatory development and inclusive development. Because citizens' involvement not necessarily leads to inclusive investment. Contrary: participatory development might mean that the more vocal and affluent citizens dominate the space of negotiations on investment priorities. This might lead to the deepening of the uneven territorial and social development within a country, or within a city, so that particular individuals' or groups' interests would prevail over the needs of the more disadvantaged or marginalized. Moreover, in the context of participatory development the position, the authority or the financial remuneration of citizens, and that of technical experts and/or of decision-makers and of the executive staff of authorities might be very uneven.

This is why, even if we recognize the inner value of participatory development and of its tool that is participatory budgeting because it enlarges the circle of citizens involved in developmental processes, we should combine this with the principle of inclusive development as you did put in your question. Not participatory development in itself, but inclusive development would result in the increase of social inclusion. In terms of results, the latter means the assurance of equal access to goods and services, among others it refers to development strategies that provide better housing conditions and better social services like education, healthcare and employment for all.



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Discussion topic 2.

Social inclusion – minority groups

We have talked about some new tools for citizen engagement around budgets and services. Are these new forms of engagement good or bad for social inclusion of disadvantaged groups? Further, given the fact that the urban fabric is made up of diverse groups, including minorities whose voice may not easily emerge in broad consultations (Afro-Columbians, Roma) with such large urban areas how do you manage to balance the needs of such minorities or vulnerable groups against those of broader constituencies? Have you developed any specific strategies or programs to promote inclusion of disadvantaged minority groups? What challenges do you face in this area? What would you say has worked?

Talking about the social inclusion of minority groups, such as ethnic Roma, I need to clarify that I am referring here to the marginalized groups with Romani background (or to individuals and groups perceived as Roma) who are faced with both socio-economic deprivations, and cultural stigma and prejudices, which at their turn “justify” discrimination, or, differently put, to people with multiple disadvantages.

As we discussed before, participatory budgeting in itself does not assure the social inclusion of marginalized groups. Referring to strategies or programs to promote the latter, and into which my organization was involved back home, in Cluj in the past three years, would like mentioning the case of marginalized Roma families living nearby the municipality’s landfill. Out of the approximately 1500 persons circa 42% were moved there by local authorities: starting with the year 2000, unfortunately authorities tacitly understood that the solution for eliminating poverty packages from the city and the unwanted/“undeserving” elements of the regenerated urban space (who were not “competitive” on the residential market) was their relocation to the margins of the locality. In this way, besides economic forces that created social exclusion, the municipality contributed to the formation of spaces of advanced and extreme marginalization, which at their turn reproduced the multiple deprivations of its inhabitants.

After the last forced eviction that happened in December 2010 (as a result of which 76 families were moved out from a centrally based place nearby the city’s landfill, so to an isolated, polluted and stigmatized environment) Foundation Desire, together with some local and national Roma organizations, launched several petitions, open letters and organized a street protest against residential segregation of marginalized ethnic Roma. Afterwards, we initiated the formation of the Working Group of Civil Society Organizations (www.gloc.ro), and continued to run similar actions through 2011 with the involvement of several organizations and individuals (academics, artists, activists). But all these were not enough to raise the awareness of public authorities regarding their accountability for the sub-human living conditions in Pata Rat and regarding their responsibility to find sustainable solutions for people’s territorial integration. The organization of a public event in the summer of 2011 with the



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participation of several international organizations (ERRC, AI, UNDP, EC, OSF/MtM), and later on, the involvement of UNDP as technical expert behind the city hall, created the constellation, which facilitated starting with 2012 the commitment of the municipality towards starting to think about solving these problems. One could talk a lot about what happened ever since with the strategy for social inclusion that we jointly elaborated (but which till now did not become integral part of the city's developmental strategies), or with the integrated housing project package submitted to the Romanian government for financial support. But there is no time here for such detailed discussions. Eventually, related to this, I only want mentioning two concerns:

- (1) for several occasions, and in several documents, Foundation Desire stressed the need to conceive the plan addressing the territorial integration of marginalized Roma communities from Pata Rat as part of a larger social inclusion and rights-based urban development strategy that implements housing policies integrated with multiple social inclusion measures (see for example in *Integrated housing program for marginalized communities, including Roma*, <http://www.desire-ro.eu/?p=423>);
- (2) one of the dilemmas that civil society organizations face in this case, and in similar cases: how to keep a balance between partnering with local authorities, and between critically addressing the shortcomings of this partnership and/or of the way in which related and jointly supported development programs are evolving.



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Discussion topic 3.

Social cohesion

Rapidly changing cities can present challenges in terms of citizen to citizen social cohesion. In expanding cities, new groups who may or may not share similar cultural traits are constantly joining the social fabric, competing for space and resources which can lead to social tensions, conflict, higher crime and higher social risk in times of crises. Is it the role of the Municipality to foster stronger social cohesion? If so, what tools are there to do so?

Addressing your question about the role of municipality to foster social cohesion, would like mentioning two arguments for why this role should be taken seriously in the context of Romania and/or Cluj:

- (1) The European Union promotes the involvement of EU and of the Member States into providing territorial and social cohesion, or reducing the territorial and social inequalities characterizing the Union and/or the countries.
- (2) According to the Romanian law of decentralization (2006), the municipality enjoys local financial and administrative autonomy, and this implies the use of local budget according to the needs of the community that it serves.

Personally, I am arguing for a tool that could be used for assuring social cohesion. This I would call inclusive budgeting (tailored after the model of gender budgeting). Inclusive budgeting means that the municipality elaborates and implements development strategies and programs that mainstream social inclusion, and it also means that it allocates public money for the fulfilment of the trans-sectoral objective of social inclusion. Among others, this would mean that all public policies are analysed from the point of view of their impact on the unevenly positioned social groups, or from the point of view of the extent to which they increase or decrease social inequalities, or differently put, they increase or decrease social cohesion at the level of the city. But all these need broader institutional changes at the level of authorities, such as the creation of a social inclusion unit that could deal with this complex issue.