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COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY of BUDAPEST

NEW SZÉCHENYI PLAN

HUNGARY'S RENEWAL

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Communication with the Public
from the Local Government Perspective

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FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

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FOREWORD

Framework and Thematic Fields for the Research Project on Communication with the Public from the Local Government Point of View

The present volume summarizes the findings of international research carried out mainly in 2011 on municipal communication at the Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary, within the framework of the 4.2.1/B-09/1/KMR-2010-0005 TÁMOP programme *Effective State, Expert Administration, Regional Development for a Competitive Society*. The overall aim of the above-mentioned Támop project was to formulate proposals for the development of Public Administration in the Central Region of Hungary. The program's leader was Professor Gabriella Ilonszki, while the presented research on Communication with the Public from the Local Government Point of View was coordinated by Assoc. Prof. Agnes Jenei.

The work involved 15 participants in total, from three countries: Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands. The majority of participants were university teachers (at the Corvinus University of Budapest and the University of Bologna) but were also experts and practitioners in municipality communication (for example, the head of communications of the Municipality of Bologna, a project manager from the Urban Planning Office Almere in the Netherlands, a Hungarian expert in local government at the European Council, and a communications expert from Hungarian public administration). These participants are the authors of the articles in this volume or within Hungarian reviews (*Magyar Közigazgatás, Pro Pubblico Bono* and *Médiakutató*) or were participants at the International Conference on Municipal Communcation, held on 8th November, 2011, in Budapest, at the Corvinus University of Budapest.

It is important to look at the operations of municipalities from the point of view of communication. When a mayor opens a festival or a new school, s/he does not simply deliver a speech; and citizens do not visit offices merely for a chat, either – for many people, communication is in many situations solely a tool within public administration transactions; communication is also "only" one tool within the complex marketing activity promoting tourism and attracting potential investors to a specified settlement. However, the success of such situations often depends on the *fact* of communication itself.

The good communication of a local government is not directly aimed at economic advantage as an outcome, so this dimension has been less studied and is less known. At least in Hungary, the available literature on municipal communication is rather limited. A few aspects of municipal communication – Including the (in practice political) communications of mayors, and communication concepts of urban/city marketing and the personal skills attached to them – are becoming increasingly known, most likely because such skills cannot be applied without specific training or expert assistance. Due to this, it might seem that there are many fields needing to be developed in the macro area of municipal communication in Hungary. The main aim of the research project was, therefore, to explore and identify needs and good solutions and ways of moving for further development.

To study the communication activities of local governments, it was necessary to exam their operations. During study of their activity a kind of a communication set of "glasses" had to be utilized, which led to the fact of there being an interdisciplinary approach. For practical reasons, the subject of the research had to be given limits, so it focused only on the external communications of municipalities, even though internal communication must be seen as important, too.

Even though our research subject had been given limits, it still seemed rather complex with its social, political, administrative, and marketing dimensions – and this complexity differentiates it from other forms of organizational communication. Bearing in mind such complexity, the research design had to be narrowed, thereby defining the relevant fields to be examined.

- Interpersonal communication in offices
- Participatory communication
- Mediated communication with citizens
- Conflict management
- Crisis communication
- Marketing-communication activity

After the areas of research have been defined, state-of-the-art of municipal communication needs to be understood in the context of Hungary's Central Region; also, one needs to explore what is considered good practice in Hungary. In a related sub-project, one run in parallel regarding time period, state-of-the-art of municipal communication in different European countries (Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Italy) was looked at so as to explore and analyze ways of operating in order to gather together cases and select good practices from the international landscape; for it is important to trace common principles and shared elements within different practices that lead to better, pro-, and interactive use of information concerning local affairs as well as take a note of a widening participatory communication that will help as regards trust-building between citizens and leaders of local municipalities.

Finally, the research plan needed to identify some areas of intervention. It seemed also important to explore where politicians and civil servants might find study programs dealing with communication that would be suitable for them, namely.

- Work and style of municipality offices
- Dialogue with citizens, participatory communication
- Usage of old and new media tools
- Alternative methods of dispute resolution
- Crisis communication
- City-marketing
- Study programs of communication

*

The studies presented in this volume are written within the aforementioned conceptual framework of our research, and they present final results in specific research areas.

The paper by Agnes Jenei argues that municipal communication towards citizens (inhabitants) requires high levels of awareness. Inadequate information supply, a dearth of attention-giving and a lack of conscious design for communication may isolate people, create uncertainties and lead to a generally bad atmosphere – and also create a spiral, where a lack of information triggers information generation and where, in consequence, a lack of confidence gives way to assumptions and conspiracy theories, when it is then necessary to reverse negative rumours. The paper first investigates the aims of municipal communication, then presents some innovative "tools", practices that have been gathered in field research in Norway, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy; and it looks at the reception given to the presented innovative international examples by Hungarian mayors and municipality heads. The paper presents some good example of a municipality's communication from Hungary, too. After a summary of experiences had in various climatic, environmental, economic, political, cultural, and technological conditions, the study finally aims to identify the criteria pertaining to "good" municipal (citizen) communication.

Pina Lalli investigates in her paper communication in public bodies in Italy. Communication practices in public bodies can be considered a process enhancing transparency, visibility, accountability, and citizens' participation. In another perspective they may be a means of public control made by political marketing, something influencing both the media and the public visibility of government activity. The boundaries between the two perspectives are often fluid and overlapping. In her research on public practitioners employed in Italian public local bodies, she has highlighted some questions on the moral entrepreneur's role in contemporary public spheres.

Agota Dobos also investigates forms of participation. She analyses the American context and draws attention to the fact that "while *citizen participation* is mostly about providing and gaining information, assistance and support from citizens, it does not necessarily mean *true engagement*, which is about reinforcing the sense of community and building up citizenship. The government-citizen relationship ranges from information exchange to empowerment and delegating responsibility to the citizen. From informing to empowering there is a gradually expanding involvement offered to citizens, so that there is an ability to *consult, include, and collaborate"*.

István Síklaki presents his case from a socio-psychological perspective. Face work is about self esteem, and its significance in the social life of public office is that the relationship of the functionary and the client is typically asymmetrical: the functionary has a higher status, in the sense that s/he represents a municipality, on one hand, and possesses special knowledge that is important for the client, on the other. The article looks at why and how a clerical representative in a municipality office can and should take care of the clients' "face".

In the book, two connected papers are written by Katalin Pallai. Both discuss Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods for use with community conflicts and disputes – a communication process with third party facilitation that aims to support the actors involved in a conflict and lead them through a collaborative process aimed at finding a mutually agreed solution to their dispute. Their introduction and use is supported by the European Commission, as they are deeply democratic, effective and often faster processes than formal (court-based) litigation processes. The value of the two papers is that the discussion and their proposal that consistent ADR terminology is introduced into new countries is based on an interdisciplinary approach connecting three fields: mediation, restorative justice and local governance; and they are written by an author who has both sound academic knowledge and extensive field experience in all three areas. The discussion that integrates the three fields is rare in our literature, and it produces not only substantive connections and enhanced conceptual clarity but a couple of new models as well, ones that greatly capture the relationships between methods and areas.

The other component giving relevance to the topic is that ADR in community disputes necessarily involves stakeholder participation. They are deliberative multi-stakeholder processes. As such, they may well be opportunities for both decision-makers and local communities to experience what participation in fact means and how beneficial it can be. The deepest hope of the author is that successful multi-stakeholder ADR processes will be able to support the emergence of more participatory local governance in our region.

Roberto Grandi, in his study dealing with city marketing and the role of cultural planning in Europe, argues the specific internal objectives to be attained are: satisfying the needs of the citizen and the productive activities of the territory to improve the quality of life while increasing the relationship of trust with local authorities and creating a profound sense of belonging to the territory (beside the external objectives: attracting new economic and productive activities by offering new public services, offering efficient public services and infrastructures, thus attracting new tourist flows; promoting a positive image).

The paper illustrates the regeneration of cities process which has been taking place from 1990 – and in Europe it was considered as framework of and the transition from the public urban cultural policies to cultural planning strategies. In the first part the author exams the category of creative city and focuses on the implications of it from the theoretical point of view. In the second part he presents a case history based on an empirical research, analysing the consequences of the development of cultural policies in the Italian city of Bologna. The author – university professor, as well as an practical expertise with a huge international experience – takes in account all of the features that constitute preconditions for developing Bologna into a creative city and looks at those features which are either insufficient or totally lacking. Finally, he gives a list of the necessary conditions to complete the transformation.

Leda Guidi gives a detailed description of the use of networking technologies and digital convergence: multimedia opportunities, interactive communication and citizens' participation in decision-making processes in the Bologna Municipality experience. She analyses portals, civic networks and the promising hybridation of the two models in the WEB 2.0 world: the Iperbole civic network as a "early social network" along with its portal; and information, services, dialogue, listening, open data, civic commons and co-design in the pervasive and ubiquitous environment of the mobile internet. Finally, the author examines initiatives like Iperbole Wireless and wi-fi free for citizens, students, tourists and city users as a way to promote e-rights and provide easy access to knowledge and equal digital society at the local level.

In the follow-up paper by Pina Lalli (When communication goes with inclusion), the author argues for a **c**hange of perspective, for all! This is the pay-off for a communication campaign brought about by an Italian municipality with the collaboration of other local institutions and associations within the framework of a European plan against social exclusion. Playing with the key words of the Lisbon Strategy, and while inviting the spectator to take a look at marginal people merely by another having another point of view, participatory-creation choices gave rise to the making of publicity spots using persons who are actually experiencing exclusion. The campaign deliberately avoided any victimization or emotional "pornography of suffering"; instead, it had the objective of awareness-prompting, giving a new perspective arising from the possibility of change.

As Gyöngyi Rózsa argues, all municipalities may have to face up to crisis situations. Major accidents, natural and industrial disasters could happen anywhere and at any time in a country – and local governments have to be prepared to handle such events properly. Most disasters are in the main unavoidable, though municipalities do have to be prepared to prevent avoidable crises – and if the unavoidable indeed happens, then one should know how to handle this successfully.

The paper aims to help Hungarian municipalities build up their own Crisis Communication Plan and to give them advice on crisis management preparations and on how to handle the media successfully before and after a crisis hits an area or an organization.

Izabella Simon examines the characteristic features of three municipalities in Hungary: Vác, Biatorbágy and Cegléd. Her intention is to identify their capacities or lack of capacity in the field of communication. In particular, she focuses her attention on the role of new media, seeing whether such municipalities are able to take advantage of opportunities offered by the Internet and digital applications. Finally, she presents some valuable tools and innovative practices that are most promising in terms of developing more interactive, locally-based communications.

Csilla Herendy examines the visual surface of three different self-government portals: Cegled.hu, Vac.hu, and Biatorbagy.hu. This was researched in 2011, with two different methods: eye-tracking research and a special, very simple usability test. Both methods help us get to understand and to chart not only the usability of different websites but also the user's orientation on such websites. The results reveal that the inspected sites are not overly easy to utilise, being difficult to apprehend at first glance. The survey demonstrated that the three sites do have usability problems, the reason for which is a bad and non-consistent navigational system.

Andrea Kő examines the spreading services offered by Social Web and a variety of participatory tools, such as web and opinion-mining systems, online social networking, blogs, wikis, and forums; and she presents policy-makers, governance bodies and civil society actors with an opportunity to bring about notable changes in the way future societies function. One of the main challenges here is that public policies have to operate in complex, shifting environments that are structured by intervening factors related to forces of change at global, EU, national, and regional levels. The paper details policy modelling and governance-related problems and challenges, and provides an overview of the Ubipol project approach and its IT environment as an example of compliance with summarised needs.

Finally, Emese Belényesi presents the reader with a view of the Hungarian training market for communications. According to her analyses, there is not one single program that might cover all fields of application within local government communication - and there is no program that makes use of more than two training methods, either. Thus, it is recommended that there is expansion of the content area, within a modular system, which will take on board all five application areas; and it should be flexibly adjustable to the training needs of particular target groups. Nonetheless, it is still advisable to also use the widest possible variety of training methods for the development of local government communication competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes). For example, interactive workshops and/or bench-learning in the form of a field trip might be built into the specialized further training degree program so that participants can become involved in experiential learning situations; while another methodological option could be blended-learning - a combination of real-presence training forms (lecture, workshop) with e-learning, which can lead to more cost-efficient training events.

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As the studies in this volume have shown, the project found and examined different areas of usable interventions and ways of moving as regards municipality communication. It has highlighted available methods, tools, practices, and has opened up prospects for public administrators, mayors, and communication experts to make use of.

The editor and the authors hope the findings and results of this research, as summarized in this volume, may contribute to extended knowledge generation concerning social and organizational communication. As has been experienced in Hungary and in different countries in Europe, there are so many issues to discuss and practices to share so that there can be further development of the operational basis of participatory communication and trust building in municipalities – even in times of crisis. International discussion and the sharing of experiences may contribute to our gaining much more knowledge in this area.

This volume can also serve as a useful tool for practitioners. Naturally, if professionally built-up forms of communication are not in line with the activities of the mayor and the municipality, then all personal engagements, dedicated time, and financial investments may be pointless in relation to the intended goals. The studies in here thus present specific recommendations in connection with this research project that may help practitioners to design and build up communications more consciously, thus making ways of operating better for the local community.

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NEW INITIATIVES IN COMMUNICATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
Foreign practices and their reception in Hungary

Introduction: a municipal communication with inhabitants

The following article focuses attention on communication with citizens. It might seem that municipal communication with citizens does not require much awareness or professionalism, as would political or marketing communications. Communication with citizens does not possess any direct economic benefit, which is perhaps the reason why this aspect of public communication is less well studied or known. It may seem that it is sufficient if a civil servant behaves in a client-friendly way – yet this is not enough.

This study highlights the importance of carefully thought through actions in the area of communication with inhabitants and describes some good practices coming from empirical research that took place in Norway, in the Netherlands, in Germany and in Italy in the second part of 2011, and presents the reception given to such practices in Hungary. Finally, it compares the foreign practices with some concrete Hungarian examples of good municipality communications. Analyzing the similarities among presented cases, the study aims to identify criteria that would pertain to "good" municipal (citizen) communication.

Before presenting concrete cases of municipal communication with inhabitants it is worth saying some words with reference to their main characteristic features.

The target groups for municipal and residential communications are citizens (the macro category: local residents, entrepreneurs, NGO (non-governmental organisations), etc.). Such groupings partly overlap with each other and can flexibly alter their composition and borderlines.

The main purposes of municipal communication with inhabitants (in ordinary time periods, not ones of crisis) are:

- to provide **information**
- engage in dialogue, encouragement regarding **participation,** and
- **trust** building.

Such goals closely relate to each other, as we shall see.

Concerning tools of communication, there are many possible interpersonal or mediated channels that municipalities generally make use of; such multiple channels and tools might be surgery hours, residential forums, public council meetings or events; local TV, radio, the municipal newspaper, electronic newspapers, internet portal, social media and blogs.

An inadequate supply of information, a lack of attention and lack of communication isolate people and create uncertainties and a bad atmosphere; they also initiate a form of spiral: a dearth of information triggers information generation – that is, a lack of confidence gives way to assumptions arising and conspiracy theories; while it is additionally necessary to reverse negative rumour circulation on issues.

Such situations can be prevented with deliberate proactive communication. This requires communication aimed at building mutual trust between the municipality and the different target groups. Naturally, though, if the professionally built and communicated image is not in line with the activities of the mayor and the municipality, then all time spent and financial investment will be pointless.

Whenever the relationship between municipality and inhabitants is not satisfactory, intentions to change may be made clear to residents mostly by changing the method of communication. In this case, external communication needs to be put on a new basis - activities need to be planned and implemented that will be recognized, where there is an understanding between the organisation and customers/residents; while there should be the preventing and correcting of any erroneous information that is being spread verbally. Actions are needed that enhance the acceptance and credibility of the municipality with different events and functions, with this providing for interpersonal communication to highest extent possible, too. From the above illustrated arguments, it would seem clear that information-based activity to build up trust has to be accessable, up-to-date, clear and comprehensive – otherwise, they cannot help citizens to become aware of their rights and opportunities they possess. Information must be provided in a multi-channel way and should be understandable for everyone. Additionally, the municipality should be inviting citizens to take part in dialogue using interactive communication techniques. One-way information provision creates uncertainties in people and will increase the distance between them and the municipality.

In order to build up a relationship based on mutual trust, municipalities should establish a participatory communication with citizens and try to involve them. There are many possibilities for participation, for example taking part in debates in the public sphere or participating in different kind of decisional processes, or perhaps taking part in the realization of public works. Naturally, it is not enough to encourage inhabitants to express their opinions via a precise or predetermined question - it is at least as important to listen to them, too; to take into account their thoughts and give persons feedback regarding their own proposals. Real participatory communication will work well if the mayor and councillors are convinced of the benefits of a symmetrical partnership between municipality and citizens

The conception of a symmetrical relationship is not always welcomed by mayors or councilliors, even though it may have its advantages – yet based upon such a concept, the municipality can, with foresight, manage in an intelligent way the human resources of a settlement, making use of collective wisdom and other community capacities (Pallai, 2010).

In addition to this, participation gives a major legitimacy to decisions. It is absolutely not always to be guaranteed that a community at a specific time will objectively approve of the most suitable decision (if it is measurable); yet is is sure that a decision participated in in such a way can better express the will of the community compared to a decision made by the municipality on its own.

The more people participate in decisional processes and feel themselves to be taken seriously, the more they are sure about "good" government. Mutual trust provides an excellent opportunity for cooperation, in which the municipality and the resident are both making efforts towards a joint objective.

The level of involvement of residents (the levels of social participation and commitment) may vary from the level of mere information provision (which is not yet at a mutual level but is the basis of all subsequently obtained levels), through consultation, to a continuous cooperation of residents and the municipality, or even to a delegation of responsibility.

The research undertaken abroad had the aim of exploring innovative tools/ forms of municipality communication with inhabitants; and some considerations should be clarified concerning the methodology used in this research.

The visited countries were chosen based on a prior review of relevant literature. In each country public administration experts helped to select used municipalities. The choice was restricted by various criteria, as often happens. The main research questions were the following:

- What is a role of communication in the municipality's operations?
- What are the driving values/principals of communication with citizens?
- What kind of innovative channels or tools are used by municipalities to inform, build up trust with and involve citizens?

In most of these countries, public administration experts helped to organise the field research. Given the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method; and in order to ensure reliability, analysis of a few municipal publications seemed a good idea with which to integrate interviews (though in many cases this would have been too complicated due to language barriers). The translation of Norwegian, Dutch and German documents would have unreasonably increased costs. Where public administration experts helped in giving interviews, they also took part in the document summerizing.

Foreign experiences: innovative ways of information provision – participatory communication – trust building

Norwegian cases

The particularity in Norway is that municipal communication is based on the principle of an extreme openness. The main message of online communication as well as of non-verbal, tangible communication – of the glass-walled buildings, of the glass-panelled and mutually interchangeable offices and meeting rooms and other such facilities – is that Norwegian public administration is a reliable and a transparent system operating in an open, democratic and cooperative society. An example of such openness is that all data of public interest is available on the internet portal; also, that the agendas/diaries of council members, correspondence between offices and complaints submitted by neighbours against each other can be seen.

In Norway, a large association represents the interests of local and county municipalities and also of employers, which organisation is the KS (Kommunesektorens interesse- og arbeidsgiverorganisasjon). All local and county municipalities are members of the association. It is the responsibility of KS to talk to relevant ministries in the name of its member organisations, to represent them in the national media and to give interviews in their name in relation to matters requiring people's attention. In addition, the association also provides legal assistance to municipalities partly because numerous and very small municipalities require this and partly because the office manager is usually a qualified economist and is not a lawyer or administration organiser (the latter job does not even exist). In addition, KS also coordinates foreign projects and handles research projects dealing with and for municipalities.

KS commissioned a research project to investigate the status and experience of local governments' use of social media in the first quarter of 2011. Data published in one volume[1] of the survey was gathered by a mix of methodologies. There was a quantitative part, with a questionnaire addressed to all municipalities and counties, as well as in-depth interviews and case examples that illustrate the results of the survey[2]. Such results (published in 2011) and results from field research done by the author of the present article complement each other and confirm this hypothesis: in Norway the municipality sector trusts the efficiency of online instruments of e-democracy and the possibility of e-participation.

Despite this, the conclusion of Norwegian researchers here is that "municipalities are in the midst of their efforts to make use of social media: 58% have adopted social media, and, according to plans, the number will increase to 71% by the end of 2011. Far fewer have established professional strategies for their use of social media. Only 46% of municipalities say they will have this in place this year." According to the results of the research, "The main challenges seem to be related to access to resources and expertise, internal organization, strategic support and (in)ability to create government-citizen dialogue. Many municipalities are still using social media as a one-way channel only, although most understand that the true power of social media is its capacity to enable *dialogue*. The survey indicates there will be more focus on two-way communication, political processes and discussions in the future."[3]

Bærum (100.000 inhabitants)

The town is famous for the extremely high quality municipality services, so this place is considered "the most liveable" city in Norway. A hundred different nationalities dwell together here.

The municipality developed its new communication strategy in 2010, whose particularity was that it was developed within a blog. It was a huge success. Discussion took place at two levels: at the first level it focused on the strategy itself (among the inhabitants), while at the second, the meta level, it was dedicated to innovative municipality initiatives and the framework, limits and threats of online participation.

According to the new strategy's Preface "The municipality's information and communication work comes at a challenging time when more and more is digital and where there are actively participating citizens. New media and knowledgeable, informed and aware citizens increased demands from the municipality for professionalism, coordination and dialogue. The municipality operates information and communication as one of several available instruments via which to achieve goals and deal with tasks in an effective and efficient manner. The Local Government Act obliges us to communicate actively and with an outreach for business. The Freedom of Information Act, in turn, requires us to create the best possible conditions for democratic transparency and control in management."[4] The most important objective of the communication activity in Bærum's municipality is "to maintain and strengthen our local democracy and local communities." Therefore, the first strategy connects with information: it must be proactive and comprehensive. If people do not understand the overcomplicated language of such information, they cannot be informed about their rights. According to the strategy, the needs of people to be informed via simple, understandable and usable language must be taken seriously. The strategy emphasizes that the municipality must give understandable, balanced, unbiased and clear information to citizens in relation to their rights, opportunities, public services and duties. Only active and comprehensive information can ensure that individual citizens are able to protect their rights and recognize opportunities and obligations. Thus the client must be put into focus and the municipality has to establish a partner-oriented communication with the citizen.

Concerning the Communication Platform, the strategy has in it three driving values: "openness, respect and courage"; and the strategy defines correct communication behaviour, for example: "Respond to input and signals - Be available for all users - Have an open practice regarding access to documents and information - Provide access to municipal public data - Be present at various venues and online communities - Be visual and give economic value that is recognizable both online and on paper.

The second strategy is about participatory communication. Bærum Municipality decided to facilitate a dialogue with citizens. In order to do this, the municipality established new internally and externally arenas for cooperation and participation with inhabitants. "Increased interaction and communication with the environment will help to renew and streamline our services and strengthen local democracy."[5] To get this result, the Bærum municipality will have a presence on major social platforms and develop the municipality's user forum as a meeting place for mutual dialogue.

At the Bærum municipality the Communication department elaborated guidelines in 2010 concerned with the most suitable behaviour in social media. The municipality needs to be present on most community platforms, and civil servants need to be prepared for this. According to the guidelines, a polite and friendly tone must be used on all individual profiles because community media is where social communications occur. It is important to know that people are not always able to separate the professional and personal via the digital identity of the individual communicating with them on behalf of the municipality. Public officials also need to know that all activities taking place on the internet are saved and retrievable. Social media is part of social publicity – and everybody is responsible for their actions on this platform; thus, careful, polite and cautious conduct is to be recommended.

Lørenskog (32.000 inhabitants)

Lørenskog is a particularly open town (with 100 nationalities) that can be reached from Oslo by bus in half an hour. Like many other Norwegian settlements, Lørenskog is able to use an internet portal developed by the responsible ministry**,** which has been tested via sophisticated user tests; and the version has been optimised for tablets and smart phones free of charge (should persons wish to take up such an opportunity).

Recently, there was an interesting electronic inhabitant initiative, the ”E-initiative”, which took place in Lorenskog (alongside thirteen other municipalities), being a two-year pilot scheme that allowed the public to submit relevant proposals via the web between 2005 and 2006. According to the program's Evaluation report, ”The electronic inhabitant initiative program (Norwegian: eleétranis/E innibyérggeriniiiaiir) allowed residents of a municipality to submit and countersign proposals for council deliberation using the council's website. It represents an opportunity for the public to make use of its right of initiative as laid out in section 3921 of the Local Government Act (Kommunefoven) electronically.” [6]

An interesting fact is that ”the pilot scheme saw thirty one proposals tabled in nine of the fourteen test municipalities over its lifetime. One of the proposals was anonymous and was therefore discarded. Of the thirty proposals from named persons, thirteen were opened for countersigning. Three of these had attracted a sufficient number of signatures for eligibility as council business. All three received the majority vote in the council.”[7]

The purpose of the electronic resident initiative was to widen accessibility, facilitate public scrutiny of proposal procedures, and to improve the process in terms of information and the activities of new groups, particularly the young. The evaluation saw improved access to and use of the right of initiative as a result of such trial. More proposals were lodged in the pilot municipalities than across the country as a whole. One reason here was possibly because it is easier to collect endorsements via the Internet than on paper; another might be that the public in the test municipalities were much more aware of the right of initiative than residents of other municipalities. Aspirations relating to increased scrutiny, better information and wider group activation were not fulfilled to the same degree, however – chiefly because local councils failed to tap into the full potential of the e-initiative system.

The initiative was expected to promote wider public scrutiny simply because submitted proposals could be posted immediately on the council Web pages along with supplementary information regarding progress made by the administration. Up to now, residents have not, however, availed themselves of the systern's heightened procedural transparency. This is an area where significant improvements could be made. Proposals achieved greater public visibility in the trial municipalities not least because the media was alerted earlier and were able to follow greater parts of process.

The e-initiative was also expected to activate new groups, especially younger people (for whom the Internet is no stranger). Yet here, too, expectations were left wanting. Instead, "the councils found that communicating via the Internet appealed more to older, already politically active members of the public, though there were some exceptions. One proposal was submitted by a teenager, and others by people who had not been involved in local politics before. The e-initiative satisfied most expectations regarding wider accessibility, but for the e-initiative to improve the public's opportunities as regards monitoring initiative processes, giving information to potential endorsers, vetting officials and politicians, and activating other segments of the population, councils need to take action."[8]

Norway has a serious difficulty in creating interest for and involving young people in public issues; this is what was reported by the public officials of the municipalities involved in the research and what was seen in results from recently conducted international research done concerning active citizenship[9], as well as the study about students' civic knowledge and their civic attitudes and engagement.[10]

Consequently, as an experiment, young people were allowed to vote from the age of 16 in 7 settlements (including Lørenskog) in the 2011 local elections – and prior to the elections the schools concerned developed programs to train young people in citizenship theory and practice.

Thus, to involve young people in decisional processes – with decisions that in the end will affect them – the Lørenskog executive head decided to launch an online future workshop (one designed for virtual places) in 2012, based on the methodology of community participation-based city development.

Dutch cases

For a better comprehension of the Dutch cases some information about the Holland local government system might be useful. The most important are the changes in town management that took place in 2002, which separated the council (decision-making power) and the operational committee responsible for the management of daily matters (executive power). The members of the operational committee are elected by the council. If any council member is elected onto the operational committee, they lose their place in the council (and they will be replaced by someone else from the same party). It is also important that the council may appoint external individuals (not only council members) too. The mayor is in charge of both of the council and the cabinet. The mayor cannot vote, unless there is a tied vote, in which case his vote is worth two votes.

Almere (196.000 inhabitants)

The only 35-year old Dutch town, Almere, was established by separating, draining, drying and filling up its area from the sea for the purpose of easing the population density of Amsterdam. The municipality of the young town, which does not have a long history or traditions, understands that each innovative idea that is based on results from social scientific research may be implemented to develop the Dutch tradition of democratic operations.

The municipality provides information in the fortnightly supplement of the local political daily paper, issued on Saturdays, and in electronic newsletters. Residents can approach the mayor and council members or members of the operational committee via e-mail, but they can also attend surgery hours – and, here, everything is like Hungarian practice.

It seems an innovative initiative that the town has an event called a “Political market”, which is held by the municipality in the town hall every Thursday evening, between 7 p.m. and 10:30 p.m., representing mostly the concept of the public sphere as developed by Jürgen Habermas[11] - yet instead of the 18th century clubs and coffee houses hosting the civic public, reasonable and consensus-seeking discussions of council members and citizens occur in a 21st century town hall.

The residents decide on the matter to be discussed by the council on that particular evening. In general, it is enough to collect 50 signatures to ensure that the council will deal with a case. 150 signatures are required to ensure that the case is not only included in the agenda of the council, but that a *decision* is also made about it. In a town with approximately 200,000 residents, this is generally feasible within a short time. The number of occasions on which any specific case can be discussed in a particular town management term is regulated.

The event takes place according to a specific choreography and script. The case is presented in a plenary hall, a place which has glass walls and has been equipped with web cameras. The presentation is followed by a kind of "Carousel" for the first two hours. The members of the council must collect all available data and views on a topic within two hours. In order to complete the task, they can use different data collection methods in smaller, previously prepared, rooms (e.g. questionnaire-based surveys, expert reports). They can also set up a focus group or have a workshop with citizens, or they can have an interview with the citizens present. The most important thing is to gain as much information as possible about the case for subsequent decision-making.

The two-hour "Carousel" is followed by a public discussion in the glass-walled room, which may last for half an hour. After the discussion the council remains in the hall and makes its decision. In the meantime, residents can talk to each other in the town hall – at an exhibition organised in relation to the topic of the event, in a different room (an exhibition created earlier by municipality employees). The council members have, in total, a maximum of half an hour to make a decision. They vote either with a 'Yes' or a 'No', and give a short explanation for their decision; and they announce it. With this procedure the previously applied, on average, two-month administration period can be shortened to three, rather intensive hours in particular cases. Another advantage of such an event is the publicity and transparency of the decision-making mechanism for all interested parties.

Another valuable tool in the hands of the council is the Council Panel, with whose help residents can be involved in decision-making processes. The Municipality often faces the problem – even in Almere – that the involvement of residents is a time-consuming and often rather tiresome task even if driven by the best intentions. This is why the municipality tries to use the advantages of online communication and establish the basis of a new type of dialogue by operating an internet panel. Prior to the start of this service (more than two years ago), the municipality tried to stimulate residents with an extremely intensive slogan published in advertisements, promotions and on postcards ("We need your advice. We shall market it.")

At present, the panel has more than 2,000 members (it is not representative, the data of its members are known). The main function of the panel is to provide guidance to council members in relation to specific ideas. Questions are put and are processed in one week, and all data is published on the internet straight away.

From then onwards, council member order such data and other council members use it to discuss a particular case/for decision-making. The public, and of course the local papers, may also benefit from such data as they can specify particular matters better by relying precisely on this. Some examples:

- Use of chemicals in cleaning the town
- Opening hours of shops on Sundays
- Should there be any buildings in parks?
- Can the registrar reject the marriage of a homosexual couple?
- Should the municipality support a professional sports club?
- Is it the responsibility of the municipality to help foreign countries in a crisis?
- Waste management
- Expansion of the local airport

Another advantage of the panel's operation is that the result is available shortly after the enquiry – and that it is used in council meetings, where it encourages decision-making and action-taking.

It worth taking note of the biggist project in Almere regarding public participation in urban planning, as promoted by the municipality (the De Laren project). In 2008, the municipality decided to work out an innovative and sustainable form of urban planning, using the method of public participation ("people make the city"). The "De Laren Project" referred to the oldest city district of Almere, namely Almere Haven. In this old district the population was in decline, and there was a pressure on the local economy: shops in the center and sport facilities (like the swimming pool) did not really have enough clientele any more. At the same time, new districts – due to their developing better services – were attracting more and more inhabitants. Thus Almere Haven was seeing its population go**.** So it was of common interest to keep this part of the city competitive in its own right.

The area itself was mostly still green – and in Holland this is considered a treasure! It was decided that the only good solution, given a challenging situation, would be to come up with a "masterplan" together with the people. It was decided to survey the residents of Almere Haven: 10-12% responded. Finally, 90 people gave their names, to join the participation process. It was decided that the city council and the executive board would set up the first four goals of the masterplan - and the inhabitants of Almere Haven would then be able to add on four more. Finally, the city council would add two further goals. During the process, there were four workshops and several outdoor meetings (in which the 90 people participated in four groups). It was the participants privilege to choose the urban planning studio, i.e. among four candidates who presented to them their plans.

In this phase there were 4 three-hours planning sessions. When the 10 building blocks were worked out, the ”De Laren Project” masterplan was approved by the city government and by the city council.

At the end of the process, there was evaluation and documentation of the project. Four groups from the ‘Haven panel’ and the participants of the online survey of Almere residents were asked about the project. Inhabitants liked the ”De Laren” participation process – it gained high approval. 96% of survey respondents said that public participation in plans for their district is important. That there was less opposition to the project than at the beginning of the process was tangible. In every part of the participation process it was agreed that through this method a better masterplan had been made.

The municipality, as well as inhabitants, learned a lot from the project. First of all, they were able to see that public participation really works. All kinds of dialogue help persons get to understand each other. The municipality inquired into the knowledge gap at the beginning among participants (with the ‘why’ questions), rectified it, and then the process became simplier. Thanks to cooperation, project managers were able to get a sense of what sentiments were regarding the project. They knew their opposition – and knew their arguments. It was important to make them see that they had the closest relationship with inhabitants; and the greatest challenge was managing expectations.

From a formal perspective, this participation process was a consultation, while the final decision came from the council. Even though, citizens had such a big influence in the decision-making procedure, and they cooperated to work out the best project – and the council accepted the four goals proposed by them (4+4+2); so even if, formally, the process is a consultation (and not joint operation), the form adopted was taken very seriously – which is why inhabitants relied on such. The communication was continual and interactive regarding the project. The municipality published every detail in traditional and new media channels. Finally, evaluation booklets were printed with the full description of the project. The De Laren town development program was a great, two-year and quite successful participation project.

The “Panel” and the “Political market” as well as the De Laren project may seem two-way, but in practice there might be an asymmetrical form of communication, in which the municipality does not consider it obligatory to take into account community opinions in decision-making. Looking at these tools as a process, i.e. by taking into account the idea that they are repeated regularly/weekly (at least the Panel met frequently), the potential of the residents to form an opinion and exercise pressure becomes more important. Interpretation, i.e. where the municipality uses given tools to thus expect the cooperation of residents in identification and discussion of important issues, may seem a well-founded one. This indicates that cooperation beyond mere consultation has begun between the municipality and its residents. The objective is to have an ongoing democratic dialogue, discussion and argument, instead of just maintaining a consensus-based, agreement culture, that is, where the involvement of residents concerned in the discussion of one-off crucial issues is not a concern.

Haaksbergen (27.000 inhabitants)

The municipality began elaboration of a framework of structured social dialogue and a concept of participation around 2000. One of the key issues of the municipality's 2006-2010 political program is the involvement of the citizen in decision-making. Based on its history, size and traditions, the town implements and assesses "classic" participation year after year so as to fit in with the concept of an open, reliable, flexible and resident-friendly town.

In 2011, the council and committee meetings of the municipality were open to the public, so residents could make their voices heard within a strictly regulated framework. The possibility of participation means involvement on both platforms; and involvement in the activities of committees is perhaps more important than participation in council meetings because the theme-based committees (construction, social, etc. – not the operational committee) are platforms that express their opinions about issues within their scope of competence, while the council, in general, only gives formal approval to their proposals.

Residents can contribute to each individual agenda item and may propose new topics too, unless the case relates to a resolution against which an appeal was lodged earlier, or if the matter relates to a municipality purchase, or something in relation to which the municipality has already started an official participation process, or if it relates to personal issues (municipal appointments) or concerns a matter against which administrative proceedings may be launched under Dutch law.

Rules for contributions are clearly regulated. In committee meetings any resident wishing to speak must indicate his/her intention, specify the topic, and give his/her name, address and telephone number to the committee secretary 15 minutes prior to the start of the meeting. After the opening of the meeting, the chairman first gives word of residents who intend to present an item not included on the agenda. Residents speak with the order of their applications, and they can make contributions to discussions of items on the agenda when a particular item is actually being discussed. The chairman allocates 5 minutes to each speaker, and may extend it if deemed necessary. Based on residents' contributions, committee members might ask questions about the topic – and the resident is able to reply. Finally, the chairman decides on what the matter's future could be.

Residents wanting to speak at council meetings must indicate their intentions 12 hours prior to the start of any meeting. The rules of contributions are similar to those applicable to the committees, yet at a council meeting the chairman closes the matter after reactions of council members have been seen.

The Haaksbergen municipality established its consultation board approximately ten years ago. The town was divided into five districts and the establishment of consultation boards was proposed. An agreement was signed on an intention to cooperate in 2003, regulating in detail the areas and forms of cooperation; there was a further amendment in 2009. Apart from the individual project-based cooperation activities, consultation boards are also responsible for making proposals to improve the living conditions of residents and provide budgetary resources for such objectives.

In 2009, an independent board, an auditing board operating at the municipality, made a detailed assessment of consultation boards on the basis of an analysis of three specific projects utilising a community planning methodology. This assessment concluded that the boards were very different in terms of ambitions, capacity and opportunities – and that cooperation was not yet satisfactory. The involvement of citizens typically reached the level of consultation in projects. But any initial enthusiasm always shrank. The auditing board also made proposals to increase the level of participation, to which the deputy mayor, also interviewed in the research, fully agreed (on the basis of his own experience).

On this basis it would appear to be a positive change if the municipality planned for the potential participation of residents more thoroughly when it came to larger projects. The most important factor is to clarify roles (municipality and residents) and responsibilities. The municipality should take up the role of coordinator, facilitator and implementing body, while the consultation boards should be considered partners. The municipality can satisfy residents' requirements only if they are informed of their scope of movement, i.e. the degree of participation permitted as regards a project in advance (consultation, cooperation, decision delegation on certain issues); then, at the end, residents' views will be reflected in the project. Precise plans need to be drawn up for each phase of the project, defining who will maintain relations all along the line with the population.

The deputy mayor highlighted one of the most important experiences seen with former projects: residents had to be informed of projects regularly. The stress is on the word ‘regularly’, i.e. it is not enough to follow the practice of TV news or to cover only results and important milestones; participants within the process need information even if there is no ‘result’ with one particular phase of a project. If, in such cases, the municipality does not communicate or it is not accessible, project participants will become uncertain about it, and may even lose their trust.

In order to operate as a successful coordinator and facilitator, the municipality needs to change its approach concerning its own role and must make further endeavours to learn about the communication skills and competences required for successful performance of its role (meeting management, conflict management, negotiation techniques, etc.).

The German case

The visited local government is situated in Filderstadt in Baden-Württemberg province that has 10.700.000 residents. Filderstadt is 2km from Stuttgart Airport and has an excellent infrastructure.

Filderstadt (44.000 inhabitants)

The municipality is situated in Baden-Württemberg province, 2km from Stuttgart Airport and has an excellent infrastructure.

The objective of the municipality’s communication is community development (where 20-22% immigrants are included), which has a tradition lasting more than ten years. At the beginning, the municipality involved residents in specific projects (theme-based town development projects involving improvement of the quality of playgrounds and residential areas). Owing to there being deliberate development of relationships with the community, now the municipality and residents have a continuous and sustainable type of cooperation, which is supported both by the municipality and residents.

In everyday life, this means that, for example, in 2008 the municipality did not need to ask its residents about specific plans for the new town development concept arrived at by its own experts – for the priorities had been set up by the residents in cooperation with the municipality in a two-day extensive workshop.

It is also important to note that although cooperation has a long tradition, in this case the municipality saw it as important to clearly communicate to residents what they might expect, what role they could have and how much room for manoeuvre they would have. It conveyed a message to its residents: that they would have more and better opportunities to improve their conditions of life, so they should participate in the project.

This message was conveyed to the target group in 17 pre-organised events (via bus trips, other sport and cultural events). The feature had in common by these events was that the municipality provided opportunities for discussions and interactive (personal, not online) communication on each occasion. The message "was received", for at the announced two-day workshop residents defined and prioritised the most important 10 issues and then continued laying down, in teams, the bases of the long-term town development concept. The municipality does impact studies related to proposals, gives regular feedback and information and the teams also do their jobs.

Apart from this program, another factor indicating the activity of residents is that as a result of deliberate and strategic planning and cooperation, nowadays 18,000 of the 44,000 residents can be regularly encouraged to take part in projects involving voluntary work; and in these projects the municipality plays the role of coordinator, innovator or supporter.

This was not always the case: In 2000, the municipality wished to identify the causes of a diminishing membership for traditional NGOs. It used questionnaires to assess the intentions of participation in voluntary work and examined the potential use of more sophisticated tools to motivate residents to perform certain tasks.

The survey result showed a society in a process of transition, in which voluntary work was motivated primarily by pleasure and for entertainment in the company of others, and in opportunities for self-actualisation, instead of by persons having an intention to help others and make some form of self-sacrifice (naturally, the intention to help others is also there, only priorities change). In this context the residents stated that they did not intend to perform voluntary work in an association or in an NGO with long-term commitments or responsibilities but wished to take part in short-term and transparent project work, which had a "beginning, middle and end".

On the basis of the survey's results, the Filderstadt municipality tried to reconsider and redefine its role to motivate its residents as regards project participation, or in other words to obtain wise, local human resource management (use of competences and abilities).

In its new role the municipality does not control, but *coordinates* services. The local administration and residents are actors and partners in the same cooperation process. The administration's expert knowledge and competences are supplemented by the everyday knowledge and experiences (in particular cases expert knowledge) of residents. According to the mayor, the council found it most difficult to accept this change of role. After this change they "only" had to acquire the technique of how to build up long-term cooperation with residents.

It seemed important to find positive examples and see good practices among the municipalities of Baden-Württemberg – though this was not enough. It was at least as important to train municipality officials to be able to riorganize and handle their tasks in the new role. From the practical point of view, it seemed necessary to develop a detailed practical guide for the coordination of participation processes and for professional management of the new situation – and this guide was distributed to all public officials. The municipality created the Social Participation and Town Development board (hereinafter: Participation office), which coordinates cooperation between the council, the mayor's office and residents, and has been operating with the mayor since its establishment.

The responsibilities of the Participation office include identification of and motivations for the participation of residents, NGO-s and entrepreneurs, preparations and organisation of participation in agreement with specific offices, support given to participation through various actions and development of the culture of mutual recognition. Its responsibilities include an elaboration of material and non-material but innovative tools with which the municipality recognises voluntary work; it helps individuals find jobs, looks at schools, cultural or sports opportunities, or invites residents to dinner or gives persons opportunities to take part in the public sphere, facilitating interviews for individuals on TV and radio. This system has been elaborated in part, but it is regularly updated with new components and ideas, with people trying to satisfy needs identified in the latest surveys. The new slogan of social participation is "For myself, with others, for others".

Important objectives of the municipality:

- The training of public officials in relation to their role, project-based thinking and building relationships with residents
- Preparation of lists of running projects and publication thereof for transparency
- Responsibilities, decision-making mechanisms and public information
- Establishment of an internal communication network within the municipality to promote an exchange of information on participation projects
- Public opinion surveys (for the assessment of needs, requirements, intentions, feelings and competences)
- Organisation of open days
- Regular information and experience-based exchanges with other, similar offices
- Establishment of a network of civil groups, pursuing a common publicity strategy (PR)

- Financing of a newspaper on social work and for the publication of bye-laws and information
- The availability of information on publicly accessible internet points
- Participation in the elaboration of training programs for NGO-s in cooperation with colleges.

According to the mayor and the head of the Participation Office, in order to keep the community active, it is absolutely necessary for the municipality to operate honestly, frankly and transparently and to sustain its credibility via dialogue. It is equally important to treat residents as partners and to apply prudence in the selection of experts for major projects ("technical" experts and process coordinators, facilitators, moderators) and to give one's attention to feedback.

The Italian case

Duality and contradiction – referred to in the Foreword to this volume (two faces of municipality communication: political and administrative) – in Italy has presented problems to and made unclear conditions for communication experts for a long time. Local political leaders filled the scope of administrative communication, while municipality officials responsible for press relations wrote political speeches for mayors. This contradiction was resolved by regulatory means in Act 150/2000, separating political and administrative communication at the municipality level and defining the qualifications/rights related the post of an administrative communicator and their role in the administrative structure; it also specified job descriptions for municipalities. An association of public communicators was established (Associazione dei Comunicatori Pubblici[12]), which has organised national fairs, exhibitions and conferences and has been issuing various publications on their activities for about ten years.

San Giovanni in Persiceto (27.000 inhabitants)

The municipality of San Giovanni in Persiceto is located near Bologna, in the Emilia-Romagna region. A particularity of the municipality is that it has a separation of communication committee and communication experts - which is not very common in Italy. The committee is working intensively for the development of a professional, multi-channel municipality communication with inhabitants and invests in online communications and wants to widen access. For major accessibility, for example, the municipality introduced free wifi usage in the city centre, in public areas and public institutions in the autumn of 2010, and will provide access to a geo-location application for tourists/visitors that will be available on people's smart phones and display tourist-information programs and the currently effective promotions of catering outlets and shops. This option should be mentioned even if it is not primarily aimed at local residents. The mayor responds in person to one hundred and twenty e-mail messages a day and to 70-80 questions asked on Facebook (his own profile). The mayor also expects other members of the council to give online responses via smart phone and to maintain contact with residents during the day.

An innovative initiative is that the municipality has begun to collect e-mail addresses and mobile telephone numbers of residents so that it can come up with adequate measures in any time of crisis. At the moment, it is distributing blank forms in public institutions and on streets, on which residents can specify the purposes for which the municipality might use the provided data. The objective is to create a database which can be used as a communication chain, in certain cases to alert the population to urgent issues. The database is not necessarily intended for use during a major natural disaster – it could also prove to be useful in heavy snowfall or in the case of a strike, as such events may cause disruptions in transport and school services.

Apart from the intensive use of online tools, the mayor also understands that some target groups can be addressed only via traditional dialogue, so he regularly visits consultation boards, NGOs, the many amateur sports clubs and community locations/bars/coffeehouses which belong amid Italian culture and operate pursuant to local bye-laws. These informal places can be used effectively because spontaneous interaction always involves potential agreement; so there will be consultation, the use of new factors/viewpoints, etc.; and if administration representatives (i.e. in this case, the mayor) are not trying to monopolise the space or discussion, communication is participation for itself – and the interaction can result in some additional output, perhaps something not originally intended.

Reflections on the foreign good practices in Hungary

The first time the above-mentioned foreign practices were presented to mayors within the context of a Hungarian conference on Municipal communication, organized in cooperation with the Hungarian Association of Local Municipalities, they aroused noteable interest (even a radio asked for a thirty-minute interview) so it seemed reasonable to set up a focus group[13] dealing with the topic of innovative practices abroad. The participators were three mayors and four practitioners, as well as three university students in Public Administration (having a special interest in public communication). The mayors represented Hungarian municipalities of 1200 to 9000 inhabitants. All participants (with the exception of the students) were taking part in a one-year specialization in Public Communication at the Faculty of Public Administration of the Corvinus University of Budapest.

The fact that most impressed participants was the extreme openness and transparency of the communication and operations of the Norwegian municipalities. According to the mayors, the glass-walled buildings and offices and the symbolic meaning given by them are so far from the actual way of thinking of the major part of Hungarian municipalities that they seem to belong in an "extraterrestrial scenario", like a "report on another universe". One mayor said that the described pictures of the open, transparent, reliable operations of the Norwegian municipality should have been a new vision for all Hungarian municipalities in their elaboration of new strategies. "Whatever we do in this direction will be good for the community." Also, "The main benefit of the presented research is that it designated the objective." In relation to this topic, an interesting debate took place on the objectives of the communication of transparency and about the possible intrumentalisation of a communication of transparency; while a further issue arising in connection with transparent operations was the logic of the political power, i.e. where there is still the thinking: "there must be a place where the really important questions are discussed, probably behind the scenes".

The other fact that made a deep impression on interlocutors was the serious intention of foreign municipalities to establish a partner-oriented relationship, to motivate citizens to participate in the public sphere and in decisional processes. They saw the Political Market of Almere's Municipality as an excellent idea – and they appreciated very much the structure of the evening and its professional realization (even though there was surprise in relation to the short time for the maturing of decisions).

Participants expressed their doubts whether Hungarian citizens would take part in initiatives like this. Concerning participation, people here saw Hungarian society as quite immature. One of the reasons seems to be the extremely individualistic nature of Hungarians, i.e. they are do not care about the community's problems, they prefer not to get involved, not to give ideas, not to participate, and especially not in voluntary work. They like to express their own opinions in public, and they prefer to avoid publicity. Our participants agreed that "according to the dominant mentality, the community's problems must been solved by elected members of the municipality". In the opinion of mayors, such a mentality is that of 45 years of communism – that is, in a dictatorship there was no freedom of opinion. A generation had learned during their socialization process that the best strategy was to wait for solutions coming from the state, and not to express their own opinion in public, because this would have had serious consequences; now, it is no wonder if people are not used to raising their voices in public. If this generation are not satisfied with the operations of the municipality, every four years they go to vote against it – and this is the right time to express their opinion. They will only make a noise in exceptional cases between elections. ”There is growing up a new generation - and hopefully the situation can be changed.”

The student in the group argued with enthusiasm about the possibility of participation and told of their own experiences and effort made in that direction, using all available channels to gain information, give feedback and to request information – indeed, to suggest their ideas for the better operation of their municipality. Even though students had a special interest in public administration and for public communication, they confirmed ideas related to the high level of motivation of Hungarian youngsters compared with the other countries[14]. Indeed, one of them brought a very positive example of the municipality of Bóly (with 3900 inhabitants), where the serious intention of the municipality to establish with the citizens a participatory, interactive, multy-channal form of communication is combined with an excellent tecnological infrastructure; here, there is a fibra-optical network that covers the whole settlement. This is a reason why the local public administration, in addition to the internet portal, has also got a portal optimised on digital interactive television, giving a place to the not widespread form of t-government[15].

The group confirmed for us that the Hungarian picture is differentiated, and there are always positive examples, like Bóly. Despite this fact, though, real and continual cooperation between municipality and citizens is more unknown in Hungary, due also to the general behaviour of Hungarian mayors, who believe they know everything better than the common inhabitant. Once elected, they probably just cannot imagine needing the advice of citizens. The mayors in the focus group thought their colleagues were far from being like Filderstadt, with its concept and role. As was explained above, the German municipality changed tradition - and where one requested the opinions of inhabitants concerning a specific urban plan (which it could have dealt with using its own experts) - i.e. the mayor first asked inhabitants about their priorities for the city, instead of starting with urban planning experts. In this way the municipality of Filderstadt puts itself forward as one of the actors in the cooperation that can be had with inhabitants.

Our focus group mayors all agreed that the main challenge for Hungarian councillors would be to accept their role change and see themselves as only *one of the actors* in the social cooperation process. Some of these mayors had decided to make a proposal to their councillors' board to find a more appropriate way to become closer to inhabitants in order to get to know the latter's real needs and competences. All participants agreed that foreign practices were very interesting and stimulating, but they could not be adopted via a simple operation of "paste and copy". The important thing is to have the same *intention*; then, every municipality would have to find their own way and develop the most suitable methods, maybe based upon one or more of the analysed practices.

The group discussed the consequences of the bad economic situation, via which many municipalities are not able to carry out obligatory tasks - so it seemed pointless to expect municipalities to pay attention to non-obligatory performances, too. In the end, though, participants thought that it is always worth investing in community development. It is even more important to use, in an intelligent way, the available human resources in a settlement in difficult circumstances, which is why all good practices are welcomed. People emphasised that courses and trainings should be available to mayors on this topic, believing that such courses might open up prospects, and they could then gradually introduce changes into mentalities.

Good practices in Hungary

The foreign good communication practices mentioned above are in line with the best municipality's communication projects as presented in the competition launched by the Association of Local Governments in Hungary. The award ceremony took place at a conference held on 22 September, in cooperation between Corvinus University of Budapest and the Association of Local Governments in Hungary, within the framework of the project outlined here. Even though not all of them are overly innovative, it worth examining at least the three most appreciated projects.[16]

First place went to one of the districts of Budapest (district XIII.) for a very similar project to the De Laren one (in Almere's municipality), summarized above; it had some features in common with the main urban planning project of Filderstadt as well. The winning project was a kind of public participation in urban planning, as in Almere, though the district's local government aimed to renew a residential street and a walkway using a community planning methodology and involving interested inhabitants. This way of working is practised all over the world - yet not very much in Hungary, even though experts in the field along with many local governments have heard of it. The municipality of district XIII. had the same idea as Filderstadt's municipality when asking actual inhabitants to provide their first ideas on the renewal of a specific zone in the district. Inhabitants were surprised, because of there being no previously existing project like this; but they finally accepted the situation, threw away their scepticism and cooperated during the entire process of the project's elaboration, as municipality partners. Public participation worked here, and the well-organized, well-coordinated and continual dialogue helped all partners to understand each other and to trust each other.

There were two other prizes awarded. One went to the municipality of Sátoraljaújhely (13.000 inhabitants) for its extremely concise and professional multi-channel organization for communications with citizens. The municipality's project consisted of gathering up all available methods, tools and practices had by Hungary to inform residents about urban development (and further work, possible inconveniences, etc.), something taking on board the town's opinion leaders. The competition jury liked very much the intention to keep inhabitants well-informed of all processes that might affect the everyday lives of people – though it formulated very strict proposals on criteria for the selection of opinion leaders. Whereas the aim of the municipality was to establish a ubiquitous, multi-channel, professionally-based communication with citizens, the jury drew people's attention to a wider aspect: to operate in a democratic way regarding all details.

In addition to the good practices mentioned above, another prize was awarded to Nyim's Municipality. The case of this micro municipality, with 321 inhabitants, is really worth describing: the settlement was "adopted" by a secondary school from a nearby city (i.e. students had got to know the village because of a former excursion). The consequences of the symbolic adoption translated itself into concrete action: for example, teachers and students help to take care of elderly people and to maintain local goverment-run areas of Nyim; also Nyim inhabitants play host to teachers and and students when they organize a special event or excursion.

Differences and similarities of the cases

The practices of the different municipalities are organised based on separate priorities in all of the reviewed countries; yet there was noticeable a common intention to realise the concept of service-providing, reception-centric, customer friendly, multi-channel, ubiquitous[17] public administration. In this framework politicians and communication experts emphasized the importance of the professional, proactive, clear, understandable and interactive, participatory communication. The only exception was the municipality of Nyim. It was not professional, and neither was it something consciously undertaken; yet, despite this, the mayor of the municipality is convinced that all development that has gone on in the village is due to interpersonal communications between the inhabitants and teachers/students. Communication creates relationships, bridges and communities.

Technological barriers to participation have disappeared, while interactive platforms, forums and techniques have multiplied as a result of the technological revolution and digitisation. The proliferation of online interactive tools, screens and hybrid media continues. With the spread of digital culture, the use of communication devices is becoming increasingly diversified, also in public administration. The process can be interpreted best within the framework of a technologically deterministic approach, according to which the dominant communication tool of our age has a power that is able to shape civilisation.

At the same time, research has also proved the hypothesis that even under technological conditions that are alike it depends on numerous factors whether or not a municipality will use opportunities provided by online devices and, if so, whether residents are willing to be engaged in a two-way discussion via their usage. Such factors are the age and computer competence of the target group; other important aspects include the geographic location of the settlement (great geographic distance between the office and the resident), weather conditions (extreme weather conditions, extreme cold, in which people are reluctant to go out), the size of the settlement, communication features and media usage, habits of a specific culture and the method of operation of public administration.

With these factors it may be assumed that certain online services may be more successful in a culture where members of a particular culture know that the service is also available on the internet (the procedure is exactly the same, if the service is used in person, perhaps with the involvement of relational capital). Based on one of the most frequently quoted sentences by Edward Hall, "Communication is culture"[18] – the differences between municipalities of different countries can be identified though, naturally, cultural differences can also be detected within the same culture.

However, apart from cultural differences the above-specified cases are alike because of the *intention* behind them (information – participatory communication – trust building).

They all seem to be in line with recommendations of the White Paper published by the European Commission in 2001. According to the White Paper, because confidence in political institutions is clearly declining in Europe, a new type of interactive government, coupled with communication techniques – the so-called *new governance* model – should be applied. For municipalities striving towards fully democratic operations, the multi-channel and multi-screen media environment provides new tools for community participation-based management and planning, if persons are interested in the transfer of not only information but also in consultation, cooperation and even in delegation of responsibility.

The next common point where objectives meet is in one's striving towards democratic operations. The correlation between municipal communication and democratic operations is also highlighted in the Leadership Benchmark system developed by the Council of Europe. The benchmarks capture the essential competencies of strong local government leadership, and for each competency they define levels of performance that might be expected from local governments. The Center of Expertise has developed a generic set of benchmarks that is published in the Toolkit, though before application all countries should adapt the generic set for their given environment.[19] The competencies are divided into three groups (known as leadership roles): Leadership, Service delivery and Community engagement. The benchmarks can be used as a powerful tool for either self-evaluation or within a Peer Review process. With the benchmarks Communication is a core competence and is also an important and recurring theme within other competencies (for example, it is part of Strategy development, Planning and review, Service management, Citizen participation, and People management).

According to the generic benchmark system, strategic importance is given to both internal and external communications in the best municipalities. "Senior staff and elected members seen as good communicators; training and expertise available; all staff involved"[20] and "Positive steps taken to engage local people, with special efforts directed to hard-to-reach groups (e.g. minorities, young people)"[21] The Hungarian adaptation[22] sets slightly different expectation for the best leaderships: "It reaches all groups of the community, it maintains a dialogue with them, and it helps them maintain a relationship with the municipality. It regularly and well informs elected representatives, public officials and local people on its activities, performances; and it consults with them on plans. It ensures that elected representatives can be contacted and it also cares about the interests of local people." [23]

Also an expectation regarding good municipal leadership is that it encourages the political participation of citizens: "It regularly informs citizens; it asks for and listens to their opinions, and responds to the views of local people, and welcomes feedback on the experiences of users of services."[24] Thus, "It provides true and continual, two-way communication between the council and interested parties.

*

Good municipal communication supports democratic operations amidst various climatic, environmental, economic, political and cultural conditions and challenges. It is deliberate, interactive and it develops the community; it provides an opportunity for social control; it is involving and is based on the principle of equal opportunities; and it is free of stereotypes. It gives an opportunity for the development of the public sphere (to get closer to Jürgen Habermas's concept[25]), which is inevitable as regards democratic operations.

It worth noticing that the new Hungarian Public Administration Development Program called "Magyary Program"[26] also put an emphasis on proactive and participatory communication (as is seen in the presented cases). According to the "Magyary Program", Public Administration has to motivate and involve citizens in the process of designing services and in decision-making processes, following foreign practices. From this point of view, the field research conducted abroad was in line with the Magyary Program, i.e. good practices have been gathered and they may be taken into consideration as examples to adapt**.**

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Pina Lalli

COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC BODIES: CAN IT SUPPORT NEW PUBLIC SPHERES?

Communication and public discourse

The discourse on communication frameworks in public bodies is involved with the principles or values governing the practices that this process makes possible. From a pragmatic perspective, it can be considered a process *in fieri,* including concepts such as transparency, information, visibility, accountability, or participation. When we speak of public ethics, we are often reminded how important it is to make transparent the procedures and decision-making processes that affect citizens, especially because the rules and the duty of equality and impartiality of public administration must be concrete, not just formal. Transparency must be coupled with the duties and obligations of visibility and accountability regarding public opinion. In formal terms, information and public visibility point to, for example, a requirement to give notice of a contest or tender and a precise indication of procedures in order to guarantee equal rules of impartiality, and thus not have a bias arising from individual or group interests.

Another important information perspective in democratic societies looks at the rights of the public to be able to scrutinize government action – this is, for example, one of the functions assigned to the freedom of the press and to journalism and the media in general. They are assumed to have a "watch-dog" role to monitor and investigate decision-making or public service practices so as to be able to inform citizens, assuring them of free expression of their judgments. Indeed, some sociologists, such as John Thompson (1995), note that in our modern times, the exercise of power is subject to unprecedented visibility, something unthinkable before the use of new technologies (television, photography and, of course, the Internet). Despite the problems, limitations or biases that such means of communication have, they certainly exercise the power to oversee visibility; so, in turn, this means that public authorities utilise more sophisticated instruments to exercise their *own* control of information. The purposes of public body control of visibility would represent an equal distribution of public knowledge among citizens, e.g. fighting influence on the media by private interests or taking care of direct and accessible accounting concerning public action in order to assure more democratic participation. This refers to the model of the public sphere characterized by collective and rational discussion (Habermas 1989) even if, for Habermas & McCarthy (1984), it arises from the 'life-world', not from the state.

A very different means of public control refers to the temptations of propaganda or, with more modern paths, of political marketing strategies influencing both the media and the public visibility of government activity (Floris 2001). With this perspective, public bodies would provide PR professionals, with overlaps between many areas of expertise – advertising, marketing, media relations and citizens'/consumers' behaviour – to make the framework of their activities as visible as is required. Thus, government press offices and communication services in public bodies might be seen, in turn, as tools for contaminating from the outside the publicity of news. As Turner *et al.* (2000, p. 30) noted, « The 'fourth estate' [the press] is in danger of being overwhelmed by the 'fifth estate', the growing number of 'PR merchants and spin doctors' influencing the news agenda ». From this point of view, communication is mainly a means to support the so-called « promotional culture » (Wernik 1991), fostering control of the new forms of visibility in our multi-informational societies.

The boundaries between the two perspectives are often fluid and overlapping. We should have here a pragmatic perspective: looking for the factual experiences of new professionals – like civil servants in public bodies – and their self-representations of accountability as regards roles, activities, and other related actors (including citizens). Main choices are often made by politicians, though practical management of any process may depend upon the concrete organization of the communities of practice (Wenger 1998) who work in the communication services and in the press offices of public government bodies. The legitimacy of their tasks is based upon a need to develop and recognize some professional activities or actors devoted to publicizing the government's actions. That is why, for example, in some European countries (such as Italy) this is called a "public communication service", i.e. which differs from political communication or propaganda. In fact, as Ollivier-Yaniv (2009) notes, "propaganda" – and even, in my opinion, any strictly political communication – tends to discredit this activity because there would be assigned an explicit purpose of bias and manipulation. Under democracy, we cannot accept as socially legitimate any monopolistic control of information nor any partisan and powerful bias preventing citizens from exercising their right to the popular sovereignty. Hence, « the disappearance of propaganda and the emergence of public communication support the renewal form and diversification of the ways in which public authorities act » (*ivi*, p. 157) in democratic public arenas.

In this respect, it is fundamental to investigate public sphere features and the role played by different actors in the communication system. Many scholars[1] have questioned the implications that actors, media, and forms of communication pose for any definition of the public sphere. For some time, the scientific debate has focused on the key role of the mass media, which can affect the salience of public issues within a space of discussion and negotiation that can be regulated in different ways and where conflicts proliferate with different degrees of publicity. From this standpoint, media studies have highlighted the role of news-making and agenda-setting in determining both the most prominent hierarchies and the meanings by which issues in the public collective agenda are defined. The media is able to frame, facilitate or suppress issues entering into the public space of discussion[2]. In modern social contexts, mass media thus appears to be one of the few, if not the only, authentically collective "arena" for public discussion. However, the coming of a "mediatized public sphere" has led many to think that, as Habermas and School of Frankfurt scholars[3] pointed out, the so-called media system is under threat of undergoing a sort of "commercialization" of information – which will serve private rather than collective interests. As the role of rational mediation, which Habermas considered to be the centrepiece of the opinion press within the bourgeois public sphere, loses relevance and gives way to more "attractive" modes of news packaging and to the pursuit of the interests of the media enterprise, the empowering role of the public sphere tend to decline. From a habermasian perspective, such a process of "slipping" from the role of citizen, rationally defining and defending public interests, to that of consumer of symbolic commodities, has been further accelerated by the advent of electronic media, especially television. For example, the pursuit of large audiences and profits has led to a proliferation of forms of contamination forms with expressive and entertainment production codes (the so-called infotainment), which are easier to "sell" to the public. This process, together with the use of persuasion to advance the interests of the cultural industries, has helped create spaces that are not entirely regulated by the impartial and rational norms required by ideal journalistic information in and of itself.

All these phenomena have noteworthy implications for any analysis of the mediatized public sphere. It is thus fundamental to reflect on the ethics and deontology of information professionals in the light of the public role they represent. In this context, some new conceptual and phenomenological developments should be noted. From a theoretical point of view, the constructionist hypothesis claims that public space must not be seen as a "given" but as «the result of complex building work engaging different actors linked by conflictual relationships; there is not a given, really open public sphere; there is a less or more differentiated system of actors who give a social definition to what is assumed to have merit in becoming public » (Champagne 1992). Moreover, as, among others, Cohen and Arato (1992) have noted, « modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through law, and especially subjective rights ».

The public sphere is considered first and foremost a symbolic arena, where many different actors negotiate the interests they represent in order to acquire competitive strength in the processes of deciding and the definition of issues for public debate. In increasingly complex and stratified contexts, plural arenas for public discussion may sometimes emerge, in which finding « a formal criterion for legitimizing government policies, comparable to the habermasian legitimacy of the laws based only on their democratic genesis » turns out to be more difficult. The reason would be that in exercising executive power, governments « communicate with the public in order to achieve the influence and consensus that translate into an increase of power, and the same is true for all other expressions of social power that occupy the centre of the system. As strategic communications aiming at increasing the power of their own organization, they necessarily cannot contribute to a discursive shaping of public will » (Privitera 2011). Yet we may suppose that new trends, like specific laws on communication and participation, do show the possibility of other processes going on inside the new information services in public bodies, where some professional communities of practice (Wenger 1998) have assigned roles using new public languages potentially differing from political spokespeople or propaganda. Then it is possible that other arenas of the public sphere could arise also from new relationships emerging via communication practices in public bodies; a phenomenological dimension is located at this point and requires empirical exploration. In everyday practice, the presence of very extended and mediatized public spheres makes it difficult to carry out strategically controlled communication, thus an argumentative shaping of opinions is still possible and a kind of transformation of visibility – and of potential accountability – takes place (Thompson 1995).

As we have pointed out, this phenomenon relates to the contemporary phenomenological innovation of institutional professional services in public bodies: these actors enter the sphere of communication arenas, identifying themselves as full-fledged information players and sources (or, at least, influence) in the processes of agenda-setting and the framing of key social issues. It can thus be hypothesized that the definition of a monolithic public sphere might be extended, together with issues of public ethics and all related decisions, even ones outside the classic boundaries of mass media production context. The processes of communication and information for which public institutional subjects are responsible – through agencies regulating communications, but also via first-hand employment of both specific professionals and old and new communication technologies – may signal and contribute to plural public arenas, that is, one's trying to listen and answer citizens' demands[4]. In these new public arenas, rather than delegating communication exclusively to the professional community of media journalists, public bodies would strive to acquire both a direct voice for citizens and an explicit, well-equipped source vis-à-vis the media themselves, or the management of information flows both internal and external to public administration. From this, a key role is played by those public administrations that have dedicated increasing resources, practices and attention to communication, both in relation to citizens/users and to media themselves, also being a response to specific legislative mandates (see for instance, in Italy, Law 150/2000, which identified specific and different roles among employed communicators, journalists and spokespersons). Indeed, as we have already noted, a new generalized public relations system might serve to replace the public communications sphere, as some scholars (Miège 1995; 1997; Davis 2002; Turner *et al*. 2000) seem to suggest, since information is nowadays one of the most important strategic resources that social groups have to manage and have control over. Then, it may be that a technocratic vision will prevail (Nash 2003; Rose 1993) and a professional networking of visibility experts, acting in public arenas, could represent a sort of spin-doctors' chess game, where any move is a mutual strategic step to gain control over the public face of decision-making and opinion-making. However, as showed by many researchers who have studied the effects of the media (Cottle 2004; Fiske 1987; Hall 1980; 1994; Kellner 1997; Morley 1980), overall control of communication is more a stake than a concrete fact: social groups and individuals have various opportunities for interaction within different arenas, depending on their different resources and on the organizational constraints that make information more or less open to an interpretive circulation; and even the information's production contexts are themselves engaged in this meaning's building network. Utilising Gaye Tuchman's metaphor, journalists and communicators « both make and consume their society's culture ». (Tuchman, 1991, p.89) A recent French work by Cyril Lemieux (2000) usefully shows how it is possible to combine Habermas' perspective and the consciousness that particular grammars of action permit the creation of productive/creative relationships among complementary figures - for example, an open-minded communicator who would take on board any critical feedback and a dissatisfied citizen, who can, in turn, could make use of new and accessible social media to build new *multi-step flows* of information, dissipating the role of the established opinion leaders[5] (e.g. the so-called citizen journalism or civic journalism, or other form of social media amateurs' networks).

What is seen with journalism and its grammars of action (Lemieux 2009) we might try to apply, in a larger sense, to public communicators. As institutional actors develop their own professional communities, where they import experiences previously consolidated in other communication sectors, the control and spread of information, once mainly held by traditional editorial sources, are at least being questioned and/or influenced by emerging communication policies. Processes of information decision-making, agenda-setting and framing might undergo a transformation which requires specific analysis in order to identify its ethical orientation and relationship with the sources of influence on and from public powers, which, in turn, will be likely to affect functioning modes in the public sphere. Such a transformation thus leads to reflection on its ethical implications for democracy at different levels (international, national, regional, and local). With this perspective, we can highlight the role – one entailing major responsibilities – which the public communicator might play in facilitating or hindering the collective processes of mediation-negotiation among citizens, interest groups and public administrators. If these processes are to be considered crucial for the shaping of opinions and decisions, we can say that this is, indeed, a *moral entrepreneur's* role[6].

Simultaneously, we are coping with another emerging phenomenon, one demanding more space for public communication – emerging from a type of representative democratic system weakness in legitimizing the efficiency of government action, where a need for a deliberative or participatory democracy is increasingly being highlighted.

The direct participation of citizens is required by new ritual forms of operating being laid out in order to better understand people's opinions alongside the electoral consensus' – for example by local assemblies, urban workshops, different techniques (such as Open Space Technology) and electronic forums or other social media technologies, by opening new institutional ways to talk/deliberate, and displaying an interactive 'fashion' for renovating the interests of the citizen in public affairs (Martinez et al. 2008; Subirats 2008; Wojcik 2007). The ideal model for these discussions would be a rational one, following the hypothesis of collective deliberation in the habermasian tradition, where citizens can confer within a framework of free expression, in principle apart from private interests because driven by a search for general, legitimate norms, which fact will allow debate to proceed in accordance with standards of critical reason. For example face-to-face interactions in local assemblies are organized by techniques assuring control of the agenda, issues, time and rules of exchanges; it is also important to assure and to monitor the number of participants. Given this perspective, efficient communication might a new form of consent control or, conversely, be a major tool both in ensuring equality of opportunities and chances for persons to engage themselves, to perhaps actual accountability among civil servants, politicians and citizens, even or especially in cases of negative feedback or disappointing results.

Electronic forum participation and other institutional uses of social media can be subjected to the same constraints, e.g. by imposing the topic agendas, formal or informal rules of exchange or some form of mastering the content of interventions. Yet the characteristics of the Internet would seem to make control efforts to establish the "good" parameters of standard discussion less powerful or less useful; instead, there are revealed new resources for use in citizens' opinion-making or new sources of political arena or debate via a sort of multi-step, dissipated/scattered flows of information, which deserve further analysis[7]. Therefore, the professional practices of public communicators could provide a vital strategy for new forms of listening, talking, debating and accounting for actions in the search for a multi-step, mutual process of influence – and not only for political marketing purposes but also for a better understanding of the social trends acting on different groups with different issues. This does not take on board mere institutional forums or social networks because the Internet represents a scattered way of talking and listening, throughout the web, where know-how concerning orientation is essential. For the principal values of democracy, one needs equality and visibility. Moreover, we cannot forget the unequal differences in social and cultural capital among participants along with the well-known digital divide: the Internet requires new forms of literacy that public communicators might recall and facilitate.

Communities of professional practice

In Italy, Law n. 150/2000, regulating the communications of public authorities and bodies, states that public communication must « illustrate the activity and the functioning of public authorities », « foster access to public utilities by acquainting citizens with them » and « promote in-depth acquaintance with themes of public and social interest ». Thus we can see that public actors are searching for more expert patterns via which to gain access to the public sphere in order to stand out as influential and legitimate sources of information about both public utilities and issues in the public interest. In so doing, public actors play an informative role by directly addressing citizens, and not solely as an audience. We assume that, to this end, they will be able to choose different patterns of action (which can, of course, interact with each other).

First, they could enter into new relationships with the mass media and influence their mediation by producing ways of communication that go directly to citizens through integrated communication plans or communication devices such as newspapers, newsletters, brochures, information offices, websites, and so on. In so doing, public actors contribute to shifting the discussion to more specialized areas of debate in which they mediate public decision-making and knowledge (scientific, political, technical, etc.) on which decisions are based. Public institutional actors will thus contribute to nourishing such specialized spaces of debate, which – according to some authors – may result in a multiplication of public spheres. In addition, local authorities in particular can decentralize areas of public debate, drawing them to territorial or thematic ambits closer to citizens' experiences and so facilitating persons' gaining access to information and verifying sources' credibility. This could be an advantage when set against the mass media – and a way of drawing attention to opportunities existing for consciously forming opinions and making decisions.

Secondly, public bodies can improve their position as an institutional source of information in a very professional way, equipping themselves with specific skilled persons, who can enter the mechanisms of journalism to gain visibility and a capacity to negotiate the agenda, i.e. such actors can learn how to use journalistic practices in terms both of professional expertise and socialization processes.

Both of those scenarios should be considered plausible – even if not explicitly stated so – by examining the passages in which Law n. 150/2000 outlines, firstly, the tasks and competences of Communication and Public Relations Offices and, secondly, those of Press Offices as distinct from spokespersons. There are important implications for such a public communication – perhaps a need for better definition of new professional roles in the sphere of communication, things partly overlapping with traditional roles and partly distinct from them (i.e. press agents, spokesmen, public and social marketers, public communication practitioners in the broad sense).

Thus it was deemed important to carry out an investigation via empirical research (Lalli 2009): we asked what are – and/or what ought to be – the actual and specific professional competences of public communication practitioners; and what kinds of actual relationship exist between journalists working for public authorities and communications practitioners coming from professional spheres other than journalism. This is a very important issue as the particular role of public information sources calls for a mingling of practices, cultures and professional competences typical of other fields with specific professional ethics and deontology. Are perceptions based on awareness of the role of public communication practitioner as a *moral entrepreneur*, as we have suggested? How do practitioners see the power associated with their task of being gatekeeper/ gatherer of collective appeals? All these tasks bring with them a great degree of ethical responsibility, which is inevitable when communication processes are activated during which meanings can be produced with effects on the inclusion/ exclusion of different groups representing citizens' interests and opportunities.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the position had by the communications offices in the public bodies' organization chart, for here there are important ethical implications too. Thus, what are the respective hierarchical levels? Which administrative agency controls and directs communication and information policies implemented by communication offices? We see it as important that one investigates the specific organizational forms of public communication and the boundary between public and political communication to see how they clarify (or blur) any distinctions and the reciprocal influence between public interest themes and "party" framing and agenda setting.

We should note also the possible consequences of stepped up communication policies in terms of a more generalized control of public relations (Miège 1995; 1997; de La Haye 1984) directed to the production of consent in relation to major themes more than to the increase of citizens' access to information, reflexive competences and social capital (Bourdieu 1980). Moreover, the birth of public communication professional communities could produce new forms of saturation, competition and lobbying, or lead to the formation of new "party" interests.

The sphere of public communication is therefore complex and dynamic. It might be following patterns of "commercialisation" similar to those feared by Habermas (1989), but it might also alter the outline of public spaces and re-propose, in a qualifying way, the theme of opinion in comparison with the theme of audience (Lalli 2008). This is why it is important to assess ethical bonds and representation models which – at least in principle – prevent the public communication practitioner from being tied to private or party interests. Thus, empirical questions deal with investigation of the organizational structure, professional practices and the deontology of public communication practitioners, especially in terms of how they put into practice "grammars of action" (Lemieux 2009) which may counterbalance influence and the public sphere. And in our research on public practitioners employed in public local bodies, we have highlighted some interested aspects in this regard[8]. Let us summarize some of them:

a) *Position in the organisation*. Communication professionals tend to be settled inside the top management team (i.e. political within public government, or managerial e.g. as in the public health service); therefore their budget is not autonomous and there is a trend to justify information activity on the basis of objectives provided by the top management. Usually, organizational regulations for the Press Office, Communication Office and the so-called URP (public relations office for citizens) do not foresee a coordinated structure, except in relation to top management; for even when a single Communication Office is responsible for something, the Press Office has its own direct route to top management.
b) *Work status and education*. Many executive communicator managers have fixed-term, temporary contracts and about half have been working for the institution for less than 5 years. So their workplace tends to be legitimated by a spoils-system dependent upon political or top management choice. Persons do not always have a specific level of education, especially those with a long-term position; the level of specific education requirements increases in the case of fixed-term contracts.
c) *Self-representation of the job mandate*. While legitimacy here is seen as being directly subordinated to the elected representative politician's mandate, it should be interpreted in an independent and autonomous way via identification of professional competence. However, our respondents recalled the "myopia" of many representative politicians, something leading to a weaker recognition of this independent professionalism in communication. Then, their skilled competences often lack the needed autonomy to deal with strategic goals aimed at citizens empowerment, especially because it could sometimes tend to be seen by politicians as a tool for their own personal media visibility or for persuasive consensus seeking. Thus a risk exists of preferring temporary activities with ephemeral but immediately visible effects, demonstrating thin boundaries between political marketing and collective interest information.
d) *Different professionalisms*. Regarding journalists and communicators, in press offices the presence of journalists represents their function as directed to providing clear, transparent and detailed information to citizens on government activities, revealing two different points of views regarding analogies and differences from other journalist operating in the mass media. One group highlights the similarities with any journalistic activity, including

both the duty of impartiality and taken-for-granted evidence; and, everywhere, journalistic work will be subject to top management's – i.e. the editor or "political chief" - decisions. Another group notes the positive weakening of some typical journalistic routines since they have to be more engaged in the role of making a public body transparent and accessible to the media and to citizens. However, in this respect, there are no concerns about the usual practice of outsourcing in some journalistic (or advertising) tasks to external services agencies, nor about the purchasing of media space when a public body has, for the media, many roles to play at the same time - as an official source of the news, a customer and/or an influential advertiser[9].

On the other side, it is very interesting to see that in our research the heads of communication offices have a tendency to claim for themselves the very function of public interest information for all citizens. Their position may be closer to citizens because it is less subject to the constraints of journalistic research for media visibility - and for this reason it is more independent of politics. The dark side of this independence concerns limits reported about a weaker recognition of their professionalism compared to the more established and visible professionalism of journalists in a Press Office.

e) *Professionalism: ethical criteria*. In both cases, the information and communication professionals interviewed define an "ethical" public communication as something opposed to the dramatized show of the media. In everyday practice, this is difficult to generalize besides there being a general definition of a shared accountability in relation to the citizen. The main capacity here is flexibility, which allows us to understand what fits in better in any situation. Except for a few cases, no reference is made to professional, ethical documents. The content of communication arises from the intrinsic duties of public bodies – and ensuring a good service to the community comes from their (claimed) professional skills. Yet public institutions often do not understand the transverse importance of an information and communication function not directed to personal visibility but, instead, to citizens' awareness and knowledge. Sometimes the obstacle is not an explicit desire to manipulate or be biased but is connected to the vagueness of the organization's position[10] and a lack of clearly established, professional responsibility as an organization of senior civil servants. It is as if full, concrete recognition of crucial professional expertise has to guarantee this independence. In this context the communicator's ethical correctness should be to act in a competent and professional way so as to ensure transparency and access to citizens in the most effective way possible, that is to promote a real communication culture in public administration bodies.

A few questions by way of conclusion

The "publicity" of public action is not separable by a reflective approach in relation to innovation and competence in public bodies. In a democratic context, public government includes regulatory ideals concerned with popular sovereignty, freedom coupled with transparent accountability of government action, and equality. Moreover, new deliberative forms for modern democratic systems require concrete opportunities and clear criteria for citizens' involvement in decision-making processes and as regards consensual or conflictual opinion-making and multifaceted processes. In this perspective, can the specialization of communicative managing "discourses" practices be viewed by public authorities only as a technical, contingent answer to an imperative need of consensus – and then of personal publicity – or only formal transparency? Otherwise, can we suppose that the communities of communication practices in public bodies may show us a different path, where communication is neither propaganda nor an ideal of pure transparency – is it an integrated, strategic culture showing the reflexive capacities of a discourse politics acting in the public opinion-arena so as to ensure persons' equal access to information and mutual knowledge produced in a given historical situation? And should we see public communicators as important gatekeepers establishing barriers while opening facilities, that is, acting as moral entrepreneurs who contribute to the "distribution of social knowledge" (Schütz 1971)? Spreading a reflexive culture relating to communication will mean active listening, a strategic long-term mindset, concern for increasingly equal access to information by integrated actions and tools, while encouraging inclusion by way of new forms of alliance and, above all, new forms of publically accessible accountability. The counter-side risk is the illusion of technocratic marketing engineering influence and power, perhaps having a show-communication bias, confusing the spokesperson's role with that of public communicator, or the ephemeral effects of political marketing done by spin doctors with the strategic function of communication for social democratic change.

In other words, have we simply to adapt our expert practices to the needs of a sophisticated form of consent manufacturing in a new generalized public relationships society (Miège 1997) – or can we critically act so as to identify even minority efforts aimed at promoting by creative communication more plural debate opportunities and at enhancing equality and effectiveness in social and cultural citizens' capital?

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Notes

1 See the major debate developed from Habermas (1989).
2 For a reflection beyond the media, see also the model of social arenas in Hilgartner and Bosk (1988), as well as the questions posed in media studies among others by Schlesinger (1978); Tuchman (1978); Gans (1979); McCombs & Shaw (1972); McCombs et al. (1997).
3 Regarding the Frankfurt School's analysis of the commercialization process, see the Horkheimer & Adorno essay written in 1944 on the cultural industry (1993).

4 See also the controversial debate on the new phenomenon of civic or citizen journalism (for example, Foulhy 2006).

5 Might we suppose a new process shifting from the famous two-step flow of communication (Lazarsfeld et al.) via the opinion leader to a scattered, plural flow of more fluid and transient opinion leaders linked, for example, to social media tools? (see Bazzarin & Lalli 2011).

6 We use here in a larger but shifting sense the formulation proposed by Becker (1963) regarding the Federal Bureau of Narcotics as the rule influencer that has mobilized its resources to initiate a moral crusade against marijuana use.

7 We cannot dwell here on this topic, but it is interesting to note that Habermas himself seems to suggest a partial shifting in his perspective on civil society when he hypothesises "communicative action" as opposed to strategic action - in the first case, participants would focus on reaching an understanding rather than on "calculations of success" (Habermas & McCarthy, 1984, p. 286). We may then find the structures – or the grammars of the communicative action – that social actors use to gain understanding via new media tools; that is, we need to study the dynamics of the scattered clouding process of influence on social agenda and collective action (Bazzarin & Lalli 2011)

8 We undertook this research in 2008; we interviewed about 100 professionals in different public communications and press offices in many Italian local or regional public bodies. Data collection methods included open individual interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, websites and organizational chart analysis. For a more complete report on the project, see Lalli (2009; 2011).

9 See, for example, the interesting issue arising in Ollivier-Yaniv (2009): how can a public body be an advertiser like others? In our interviews, we do not find any concerns about the agenda-setting role, while professionalism is not involved in any definition of a priorities hierarchy - it is only considered at the end of the process in order to account for "what the public body does" (that is, in its "governmental program"). If news has to be selected, the quasi-routinary choice is referred to the top manager (political or managerial), someone recognized by the journalist or by the communicator as the primary decision-maker. It is partly seen in a "*framing*" role, though is muffled by evocations of the general interest of "facts" or responsibility towards the "employer" (i.e. we may quote from our interviews the following utterance: "do not what may require you to speak ill of your own employer").

Media relations are a part of one's professional work, being regulated by skills that help to make available information but also to demonstrate in it citizens' interests. It is important to know the media machine and to maintain trustful relationships with other journalists – and this is precious capital in whose name one might select news in order to keep up the relationship because, in this way, one can negotiate and sometimes make a compromise so as to avoid a scandal/bad-showing in news framing, which could be counterproductive for the institution, hence for the community of citizens. Thus, the unique criterion of newsworthiness is “what the Body does”.

10 For example, sometimes the spoils-system within recruitment methods may make other, non-professional abilities relevant.

Ágota Dobos

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRACTICES OF AMERICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Introduction

Government by and for the people has been the cornerstone of American democracy since the time Thomas Jefferson created the vision of self-governance. However, along with changing socioeconomic structures, societal values and behaviors, the style and degree of public participation in governance have seen major changes, too. Changes have also affected the processes and techniques of public decision-making. Many Americans expect the U.S. to have a leadership role and a special mission in the world by providing a model of democratic processes for other countries. (Walsh, 1999: 2; Yankelovits 1991 in: Walsh, 1999:2.) The purpose of this study is to give an overview of current issues concerning the citizen engagement practices of American local governments based on literature review and the resources of the International City County Management Association, (ICMA) Washington D.C.[1]

Citizen participation is at the center of attention of local government professionals and is a growing field of research in the U.S. "Local governments need to do more to promote citizen engagement" – this was the main conclusion of the Big Ideas Conference 2009 held in Decatur, Georgia. As a result of conference discussions, a White Paper entitled *Connected Communities: Local governments as Partners in citizen engagement and community building* was issued to help improve the practices of meaningful citizen engagement via outlining ways in which local governments might act in partnership with a wide range of actors in the community. (Svara and Denhardt, 2010: 4) Besides ICMA resources, the present study primarily focuses on the findings of this White Paper, being one of the most recent summarizations of related research papers; and it intends to present various topical aspects related to citizen participation that may be critical in terms of current practice and the proposed future directions of such development.

American literature on governing and government performance has reflected the changing attitudes of people towards government and public affairs for more than two decades. Public opinion polls indicate that since the 1990s many Americans have gradually lost confidence in government institutions. People do not trust their local government to resolve problems, and even more have little or no confidence in their state or the federal government. As a result, citizens are reluctant to participate in public affairs that they feel they cannot influence. Natural and social disasters, the economic crisis and the growing terrorist threat in the past decade have all brought about powerful public criticism of the performance of government institutions at all levels. (Tapscott, 1996; Salamon, 2002.:14; Kamarc, 2002; Behn in: Donahue-Nye, 2002: 323-342; Walsh, 1999: 2) Yet September 11, 2001 was a turning point, and it contributed to an increased public interest in politics in general and in processes affecting local communities. The vulnerability of the nation was more tangible than ever here, drawing the attention of both governments and the public to the shortcomings of the operations of responsible government agencies and to the urgent need for action. It also helped the federal government get back on track as regards regaining lost confidence. Public service and new government jobs have become more attractive, voluntary organization-based activity has seen a boost, and the attention of the public has become more focused on public and community issues, thereby providing more favorable conditions for improvement efforts as regards citizen engagement, too.

There seems to be a need to adapt democratic local governance to the complexities and challenges of contemporary society. "A major challenge is connecting citizens and government in a democratic framework of civility and responsibility. This is a critical issue that gets at the heart of what democracy is all about…To the extent that people don't trust government or just don't care, that has a real impact on what … elected officials can accomplish." (Schwartz in: Walsh, 1999: 2.) The basic conditions necessary for an effective democracy are: an informed citizenry, active participation, public judgment, equal opportunities, citizen influence, civility and respect – and these are ambitious goals needing to be achieved. (Walsh, 1999:6.) Despite positive shifts here, Lachapelle and Shanhan state that "civic engagement in the United States – including active involvement in local governance – continues to be lacking both in terms of quality and quantity. (Lachapelle and Shanahan, 2010. 404) The aforementioned White Paper seeks ways of improvement and it is adding new perspectives to the finding of possible solutions to problems.

From participation to engagement

King distinguishes between two types of citizen participation and engagement activities: 1) *instrumental* and 2) *normative activities*. While the former aims at increasing the efficiency of government decision-making processes and informing citizens or receiving citizen responses to government decisions, the latter focuses on those activities that seek to strengthen communities, democracy and governance processes. The majority of involvement methods currently being used by local governments are instrumental, and do not provide an opportunity for citizens to interact with each other or with local government staff and/or council members. If one wishes to change relationships within the community and enhance the effectiveness of participatory processes, more efficient forms of engagement and partnership should be used, ones primarily belonging among the normative activities. (King, 2000: 52) Walsh confirms that there is a "distinct but subtle difference" between involving somebody in administrative processes, and actually empowering them to decide what the policies should be. (Walsh, 1999: 11) In fact, both types of engagement are necessary and useful if they address the goals and the objectives adequately.

The shift in the quality of involvement is also reflected in the terminology in use. While *citizen participation* is mostly about providing information and gaining information, assistance and support from citizens, it does not necessarily mean *true engagement*, which is about reinforcing the sense of community and building up citizenship. *Citizen engagement*, the most preferred approach these days, is basically *interaction*, a reciprocal form of exchange instead of the traditional one-way 'exchange' of information between the government and citizens. Experts agree that local governments have to move beyond the traditional type of *hearing* to find ways that provide conditions for *listening* and the engagement of citizens in creative problem-solving, for the generating of better understanding and perhaps dedication to community affairs. This approach is more likely to result in public support for sensitive decision-making. "Community engagement is a participatory community process that reminds us that we can all learn from each other. It requires systematic probing, concentrated listening to the concerns of community members, and dialogue about possible solutions. It is an iterative process that brings together a diverse group of stakeholders to identify problems and generate strategies to meet them." (Waffle et. al., 2010)

In local governments there is an inherent potential – and experience – to be motivators of citizen engagement activities; for local governments are effective organizers of several types of program and partnership, even if many of them are not known outside the local community. Yet governments need to find new ways and techniques; they need to facilitate dialogue and engagement with and between various local players beyond the mere exchange of pieces of information. (Svara and Denhardt, 2000: 6-7) While engagement always includes an exchange of information, simply conveying information is no longer adequate as regards achieving the desired higher level of involvement.

The example of citizen participation in local government planning illustrates why the traditional method of public hearings is insufficient for addressing new needs. Klein refers to citizen participation in local government planning as a practice that has a long history. It is prescribed by law that public hearings should precede official decisions on issues affecting the future of the whole community – e.g. as with land usage, environmental protection and urban revitalization. In addition, there are a dozen other questions (zoning changes, residential developments, etc.) in which most states require hearings. Most federal programs that require planning also require the administration of participatory processes – which traditionally mean public hearings – although it has long been evident that they seldom produce meaningful citizen participation or engagement when people have the chance to have real impact on public affairs. Old-style hearings fail to be an efficient medium for citizen participation for several reasons. The biggest problem is that the hearing is often held at the closing stage of the process, when citizen input is not really able to further shape the project; i.e. experts often seek the support of the public for an already completed plan. In these cases the planning process does not involve the public, and the public is not considered a partner when making difficult decisions that will personally affect it. Public officials often think that hearings represent the opinions and interests of a narrow part of the community only, that is, those who feel strongly about the issue and have extreme positions; or they may be the sort of persons who attend any and every kind of public meeting in town. On the other hand, there are people with legitimate opinions who are not represented at all because they do not feel competent enough to talk in public due to a lack of knowledge or poor verbal skills, or they are simply unable to participate at the given time and place. Even if the turnout rate is encouragingly high, hearings can do very little to promote a consensus as there is no opportunity for citizens to discuss the issue – i.e. what they are expected to do is just to testify, one after the other, before a board. According to Klein “the old-style public hearing mentality often represents a form of public engagement that is too little and too late.” (Klein, 2000. in Hoch et. al. 2000: 425-426)

Svara and Denhardt argue that regarding the goals of citizen engagement there is dual motivation behind engagement efforts. From a normative point of view, it is the "*right thing*" to involve the public because it helps develop a sense of belonging to the community and prepares people to become responsible citizens, that is, to be persons who are interested in what happens in their neighborhood. In such cases engagement *itself* is the ultimate goal, something according with democratic ideals such as promoting an advanced openness, collaboration, a sense of shared responsibility and creating a new form of citizenship. If it works well, citizens become more active, and the open dialogue becomes part of the communication culture. The normative approach prepares the field for the instrumental one, when active citizen engagement is required to help a local government handle community problems. This is the *"smart"* thing to do because the tasks local governments need to perform are growing in number and complexity, and invaluable input can be expected from the active involvement of citizens who are directly or indirectly affected by decisions. It is important to gain the acceptance and the cooperation of the people in the making of decisions; otherwise the proposed solutions might easily fail owing to a lack of community support. (Svara and Denhardt, 2000: 6-7)

Involvement can firstly cover decision-making in policy fields, setting priorities and goals, and solving problems; secondly, it can deal with service delivery. The table below is a slightly adapted version of an illustration offered by Svara and Denhardt to show the involvement of citizens in a reciprocal exchange both from the perspective of local government and of the citizen. The integrated analytical framework includes interaction goals and the nature of involvement of citizens in policy-making and service delivery, as well as the expected response of the citizen.

The government-citizen relationship ranges on a continuum from information exchange to empowerment and delegating responsibility to the citizen. From informing to empowering there is a gradually expanding involvement offered to citizens, so that there is an ability to *consult, include and collaborate*. Reciprocity means that the government cannot be a successful mediator or facilitator if residents are not willing to cooperate. People are expected to be interested, *inquire, express opinions, make suggestions, and even take responsibility*. It is a vicious circle: if the government is not providing any opportunity for 'a real say', residents have no good reason why they should attend events – which creates an impression that they are not interested or are indifferent. This is the point when instead of giving up its efforts the local government should come up with attractive and long-term initiatives and alternatives to facilitate the process.

Table 1. Public Involvement Spectrum in Local Governance

Local governments are expected to do					
	Exchanges with Citizens		Citizen Engagement		
Interaction in policy making	**Inform**	**Consult**	**Include/ incorporate**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Goal: Decision-Making and Problem-Solving	Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions	Receive and respond to resident comments, requests, and complaints Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions	Work directly with citizens throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered by staff.	Partnership with citizens in every aspect of a decision, including an identification of issues, development of alternatives, choice of the preferred solution, and implementation	Place final decision-making authority or problem-solving responsibility in the hands of citizens
Interaction in service delivery	**Provide/ Enforce**	**Consult**	**Include/ incorporate**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Goal: Service Delivery and Addressing Community Needs	Provide services and enforce laws and regulations with courtesy, attentiveness, helpfulness, and responsiveness to citizens	Receive and respond to citizen requests and complaints Obtain public feedback on the quality of or satisfaction with services	Involve citizens in deciding which services to evaluate and in assessment of results Involve citizens as volunteers and in production of services	Partnership with citizens in determining service priorities and taking action to achieve objectives, e.g., crime watch Partnership in services with non-governmental organizations	Place final responsibility for meeting a community need in the hands of citizens or facilitate and accept citizen initiatives
Local residents are expected to do					
Interaction between government and community*	Inquire	Propose/ express opinions	Discuss/ deliberate/ volunteer	Take part on a continual basis	Assume responsibility/ initiate

Source: Svara and Denhardt, 2000: 9-11
**The adaptation occurs in the marked boxes and in a combination of the two figures.*

Svara and Denhardt state that effective citizen engagement is unimaginable without changes in the behavior of both public servants and citizens. "Although there may be important differences between the perspectives of citizens and governments, they can reinforce each other if responsive, well-designed, and strategic approaches to citizen engagement are developed and supported by residents and officials" (Svara and Denhardt, 2010:12. id. Thomas 1993). According to Walsh, the major benefits of the empowerment of citizens to participate in the governance of local communities are the following: empowered citizens tend to be more active and a strong civil sector can offer a lot of support to local governments; a better understanding of the complexity of local issues will result in more supportive attitudes to government performance; the potential of a group of people will enhance problem-solving; they will be more dedicated to finding solutions to problems if they are included in processes from the beginning; and it facilitates consensus if stakeholders are offered engagement in a win-win problem-solving process. Citizens' perceptions of public decision-making can be changed by offering them a new model. (Walsh, 1999: 12)

Svara and Denhardt suggest making clear distinctions between *citizens, customers, stakeholders and partners* when defining the target group that one wishes to involve in local affairs. If the goal is to engage citizens in neighborhood-related problems, we need to be inclusive and go beyond the legal definition of the 'citizen' as a taxpayer with a legal status. By treating residents as customers reduces their relationship with the government to one of getting service delivery; and by viewing citizens as stakeholders has the danger that we consider only those who are *directly* affected by a situation or decision, which does not create true engagement either. Bryer proposes that the divide between governments and citizens should be bridged by building up partnerships, something which is broad enough to include the widest target groups. (Svara and Denhardt, 2010:14-16; Bryer, 2010: 74)

Approaches to citizen engagement

The methods and forums of citizen involvement are summarized in the table below, based on ICMA resources and the White Paper. By adapting the framework given by Walsh, we intend to match the given approaches with the functions of *community building, public information, deliberation and decision-making*, while indicating the scope and role of each method in citizen engagement. *Learning from each other* is added as a new column to highlight the importance of learning in the interaction. (Walsh 1999: 36-49; Svara and Denhardt, 2010: 14-36) The

White Paper gives several perspectives on how new information technology might foster communication and increase engagement – and such developments are also included in the original framework.

Table 2. Methods and forums for involvement

Type of forum	What is it about?	Most useful for				
		Community building	**Public information**	**Deliberation/ dialogue**	**Decision-making**	**Learning from each other**
collaborative decision making dialogue	includes everyone who has a stake in the issue	√	√	√	√	√
study circle	a facilitated small group session to learn about a particular issue, and to raise awareness of others' perspectives	√				√
community visioning	visioning sessions to envision the future of the community, to see the consequences of decision paths	√				√
community forum	facilitated and technology-assisted forums with the purpose of problem solving	√		√		√
strategic planning	involves the whole community in developing long-term goals and objectives; survey and all-day workshop, setting priorities	√	√			√
search conference	major stakeholders (15-35) meet at a two-day facilitated conference to search for ways to attain a desirable future	√	√	√		√
public information outreach	newsletters, presentations by experts, hot lines, cable TV, local service centers for better accessibility, electronic information kiosk with touch screen, computer bulletin board	√	√	√		√
citizen survey	regular polling	√				
youth involvement program	internship programs for high school students	√				√

public "listening"	a new form of public hearing, small group discussions facilitated by volunteers, special topic forums, opinion survey is filled out by every participant, results presented to the city council, summary report and follow-up letter to the participants	√				√
neighborhood district council	setting priorities, communication between citizen groups	√	√	√	√	√
community celebration	community-wide celebrations of different kinds	√				
Volunteerism	volunteer work in all aspects of public life	√				√
citizen panels and focus group	measuring preferences and soliciting opinions, engaging citizens in ongoing dialogue	√		√		
community meetings with small group discussion	fostering exploration of shared concerns and hopes	√		√		√
educational program	educating citizens in several fields to be more prepared for participation in decision-making; educating government employees	√		√		√
Internet and social media, interactive websites, online forums Facebook and social networking sites **Twitter, iPhone. GPS**	digital neighborhoods linked by face-to-face communication as well as new technologies, people can send photos, can define their location using handheld devices, can submit proposals and vote online	√	√			√
art, dance, theatre, and story-telling.	relying on the creativity of the citizens to express thoughts and ideas that might otherwise be too difficult to communicate	√				√
neighborhood organizations home owners' associations	tool of self-governance in several fields in active collaboration with the government	√	√	√	√	√

In addition to the above methods and forums a variety of other approaches can be used in parallel. The selection of the most appropriate tools in a concrete situation is based firstly on the goals and objectives, and then on factors like the nature and the complexity of a problem, the stage of the process, needs, the available information and time constraints. Svara and Denhardt state that there is no single best way to do things – some methods are better for short-term purposes, while others are more suitable for ongoing activities. Each one has its advantages and the better the one we choose, the more effective and efficient our engagement efforts will be. (Svara and Denhardt, 2010: 21) To put it in practice Walsh puts forward ten steps that one should take to connect citizens to governance, which represent the essential stages of a project planning process in which all the conditions, resources and risks are carefully evaluated, and an action plan is drawn up based on the expected outcome.

1. *Identify the issue*
2. *Identify major stakeholders*
3. *Identify the values and beliefs held by the stakeholders*
4. *Identify the outcomes you want*
5. *Identify and balance the concerns of experts, special interests, and the media*
6. *Identify the ethical aspects of the issue*
7. *Identify obstacles to resolution*
8. *Select the most effective method/forum*
9. *Decide what role local officials will play*
10. *Develop an action plan*

Citizen engagement from the perspective of learning

Changed requirements bring new challenges to local officials: the challenge of facilitating public debate, creating opportunities for change and empowering citizens. They have to encourage diversity, help define new relationships with citizens, develop new processes of communication and interaction, experiment with new methods and solutions to issues, facilitate cooperation between community groups, and realize that the leadership role should be shared with citizens. (Walsh, 1999: 14-15) The accomplishment of these tasks requires new competencies from local officials, including facilitation skills that promote the managing of more inclusive processes. New opportunities mean new challenges not only to local officials but to the citizens as well. In order to cope successfully with expectations from and the benefits of available opportunities, both government employees and citizens need new knowledge, skills and attitudes. In this way, citizen engagement can serve to foster life-long and life-wide learning both among professionals and citizens alike. The local government organization itself has an important impact on the functioning of civic engagement. Government employees working in a flattened organization, where they are involved in self-directed and cross-functional work teams, are more motivated and more responsive to the needs of citizens who require a similar ‘treatment’. (Walsh, 1999:33-34)

If we note a parallel between methods used for the engagement of citizens and those applied for the purposes of adult education and training, the Mutual Learning Model by Schwarz could serve as evidence of the validity of shared underlying core values and assumptions when addressing participants as partners either in education or community action. They are, for example, *valid information, free and informed choice, differences seen as opportunities for learning, respecting the opinion of others, internal commitment, and compassion*. The strategies based on these core values include *focusing on interest not positions, combining advocacy and inquiry, using a decision-making rule that generates commitment*; and the result could be *increased trust, understanding and a reduction in non-productive conflict and defensiveness, increased effectiveness and a quality of life.*(Schwarz, 2005.in: Schwarz and Davison 2005:42) Conditions that provide a favorable learning environment can also be effectively used in various kinds of forum and event serving the engagement of citizens who constitute very heterogeneous and diverse groups in terms of age, qualification, cultural and financial background, interests, etc. Several methods for interaction with the public use facilitated small group discussions, which provide an opportunity for dialogue, where ground rules are set and everybody is given an opportunity to share ideas and experiences, and learn about the experiences of others. Facilitated interaction and involvement in small group meetings and workshops are key factors in both meaningful citizen engagement and effective adult learning. Similarly to learner-centered approaches in education, citizen-centeredness is a key to successful citizen engagement.

The educative aspect is strongest in targeted education programs, like for example in the citizen board training program developed in Montana to prepare citizens for public service. Citizens are offered elected or appointed positions on government boards, e.g. the planning board or the housing board, where they can interact with each other in the formal government rule-making process, though in order to fully utilize this opportunity they need special preparation. At the University of Montana a training curriculum was developed that covers four main areas: 1) foundations of governance, 2) effective meeting techniques, 3) conflict management, 4) leadership and team building skills. Materials include a handbook, case study exercises, handouts and worksheets and web-based resources such as podcasts; and the methods used during training facilitate interaction. (Lachapelle and Shanahan, 2010: 401-403)

The ICMA resource material "Building Citizen Involvement" is aimed at elected local officials and appointed administrators, to train them in how to work more effectively with citizens. ICMA offers a list of 18 core practices determined as essential for local government management. This list includes *Democratic advocacy and citizen participation* and is defined as "demonstrating a commitment to democratic principles by respecting elected officials, community interest groups, and the decision-making process; educating citizens about local government; and acquiring knowledge of the social, economic, and political history of the community"; it also emphasizes the learning aspects. (www.ima.org) According to a 2011 survey, this core practice is ranked 8 among the 18 practices regarding the frequency of its occurrence as a field of targeted development by ICMA professional development workshops and web conferences.[2] The training material based on this particular core practice intends to develop the knowledge and skills that connect with democracy, community and citizen participation; dealing with change; building collaborative community; and that connect with interpersonal and process skills as tools for collaboration.

The outcome of thoughtful and ongoing citizen engagement activities may be the *connected community* as suggested in the White Paper. "Citizen engagement activities are connected to what citizens perceive to be important. Citizens are connected to each other and to local government through engagement activities. Citizens are connected by electronic and traditional linkages that permit the generation of information, consideration of alternatives, and joint action. Participants in various citizen engagement activities are connected to each other to expand civic capacity, activities are linked and support each other, and new ventures build on previous ones. Organizations in the community are connected to citizens and the local government as partners in engagement."(Svara and Denhardt, 2000:24) To create connected communities seems a "right and a "smart thing" to do in every community regardless of geographical location; and the American practice envisioned in the White Paper could well serve as a benchmark for long-term future development.

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Notes

1 ICMA's mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide. For more information please visit the website: www.icma.org. The author of this article spent several months at ICMA as an intern first and a senior research fellow in 2010.

2 The survey was undertaken by Ágota Dobos.

István Síklaki

FACE WORK AND THE STYLE OF THE OFFICE

Face work is about self esteem, and its significance in the social life of public office is that the relationship of the functionary with clients is, typically, asymmetrical: the functionary possesses a higher status, in the sense that s/he represents a municipality on the one hand, and, on the other, has special knowledge that is important for the client. First, we shall describe the face work concept as developed and analyzed by Erving Goffman, in his famous book, Interaction Ritual (Goffman 1967); then we will outline an extension of the face concept by Brown and Levinson (1978), who developed a theory of politeness in conversation; and, finally, we will look at why and how a clerical representative in a municipal office can and should take care of the clients' face.

To arrive at the concept of face, we, following Goffman, need to begin with the concept of "line". Goffman takes this concept from the world of the theatre, as a metaphor for the social activities of a person in one particular situation. The "line" in a situation is related to the way one perceives one's own self and those of others. Through evaluating our own self in a social situation and also the selves of other participants, one engages in non-verbal as well as verbal behaviour. This behaviour relates to and is indicative of one's point of view in the situation, and it contributes to one's "line" in a given situation. It does not matter whether one intends to take a line or not – she will soon realize that this is exactly what she is doing. *Nolens volens*.

The "line" is taken as the positive social value acclaimed by a person and can be defined as one's "face". Thus, one's face is based on the "line" attributed to her by the other participants in the situation. The face is a kind of self-image given definition by socially-supported attributes; the face is an emotive representation of the self – we are connected to our face by an immediately affective reaction, that is, as our relationship to others allows. If in a particular situation we are given a face that is more positive than we could have expected, we feel uplifted; yet if our well-established expectations about our self are not supported in a specific situation, we will feel downhearted and hurt.

A person can be said to have or maintain face when the line she actually enacts displays an internally consistent image of herself, one supported and reinforced by the evidence provided by the other participants in the social situation. In a relationship of a specific kind, the person will be known to have certain characteristics, she can be expected to 'carry' a certain face, and the person can feel it to be morally appropriate. Nevertheless, while a person's attention is focussed on the present situation in efforts to maintain face, the *broader* social context is also relevant. Someone who is able to maintain face in the present situation is someone who has behaved in the past in such a way as to avoid any behaviour that may conflict with the later maintenance of face. She has another reason, too to be afraid of losing face: other participants might take such loss as a negative sign, one that could make them think that they do not need to respect her face in the future - yet towards someone with whom they do not expect any contact in the future, they can afford to be haughty and thus act out a line so high that it may well be seen to be a future error.

There are a number of ways someone can be related to her face. Someone has the wrong face when she reveals about her social value something that cannot be integrated into the line she carries. Someone is out of face when she interacts with others without being ready to carry a line expected of someone taking part in a given situation. When we feel that we are maintaining face, our behaviour is characterized by self-confidence; if we are sure of the line we are carrying, then we feel steadfast and we can appear confident in front of others. Yet when someone is in wrong face or is out of face, she contributes to the interaction expressive events that are not easy to weave into the expressive order. If she feels that she is in wrong face or out of face, she will probably feel ashamed and embarrassed, and will feel in a subordinate position – partly because of the harm she has caused to the expressive order and the current activity, and partly because of the harm done to her reputation. She relied on such interaction to support a self-image she has of herself, one that is emotionally important for her – and now she sees it as threatened. If she cannot feel support for her face in the interaction, she may become confused and unable to contribute to the interaction; she may feel embarrassed, sad and ashamed. Of course, she could conceal this confusion, for poise is the ability to conceal a shamed face.

In the dynamics of face work we talk about losing face when we have the wrong face or are out of face or ashamed. We use the phrase to save face for the process by which we maintain the impression with others that we were able to protect our face. We have another phrase, borrowed from the Chinese: to give someone face. It means that we allow her to carry a line which is better than she would otherwise be able to display – and this way one *gains* face.

Now, let us consider the situation of a client in an official environment. The typical client does not have much experience with such institutions or with the norms and workings of a bureaucracy and procedures via which to handle issues. Yet clerical staff have a well-established routine in the office, know the scripts and procedures, and have a clear idea of and practice in the ways people are expected to behave in such an office. Therefore the typical client has to confront a dangerous situation where she may well lose face; she needs a good deal of poise to conceal her embarrassment. So she will have a hard time managing her case effectively when she has to make considerable effort to maintain her face. The clerical staff in such a one-up position may feel tempted to exploit the situation and take advantage of the client's one-down position and embarrassment. This temptation may be strong – and, indeed, inadvertent; for clerical staffs are often unaware of the psychological consequences of their behaviour. Thus it is important to train such persons in empathy towards clients, and the verbal and non-verbal ways with which to give a client face, thereby counterbalancing their 'handicapped' position.

However, it is not an easy task to steer social interaction in a direction that not only saves someone's face, but which may even give her a face. Clerical staff often have to pursue conflicting interactional goals. Let us consider some:

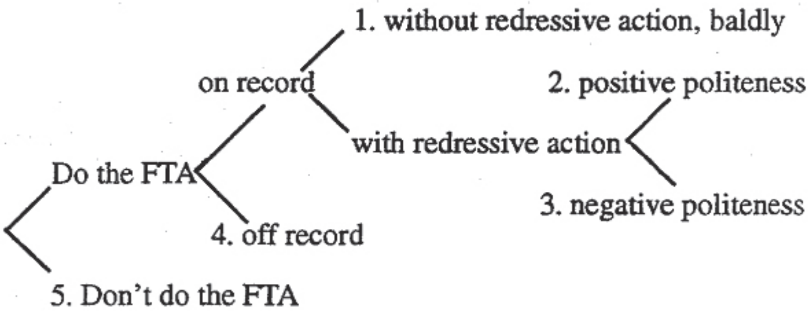
- They should provide the client with a precise, correct and efficient service
- They are expected to manage time – both theirs and that of the client – in an efficient way, so they should formulate their utterances in a concise way
- They are expected to provide information probably lacking on the side of the client – that is, they have to suppose that the client is uninformed in several respects, though revealing this assumption will appear as a serious threat to the client's face
- They often have to ask the client for information pertaining to the issue at hand – and such an interrogation is a threat to the client's face, by definition.

This list can most likely be extended to a major degree, but it can be taken for granted that office staff have to pursue conflicting interpersonal goals simultaneously. The solution in such situations is to resort to indirect ways of communication. The most traditional, ritual form of indirect communication in a social interaction is politeness – so we shall turn to this topic, more specifically to the theory of politeness as laid down by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978).

In such situations the office staff member will carry on with the communicative act in spite of a perceived threat, i.e. she may be well aware that it is threatening the face of the client but she has no other choice. However, she may consider a number of alternatives to mitigate or compensate for the face threatening act. In order to analyze these alternatives Brown and Levinson suggested a refinement of the original concept of face. They make a distinction between negative face needs and positive face needs.

The concept of *Negative face needs* refers to the demands of all competent adult persons that their autonomy is respected - that is, she should not be forced to do something she otherwise does not wish to, others should avoid intruding into her personal space, etc. While *Positive face needs* are quite close to the face concept outlined by Goffman: this has in it a consistent personality and consistent self-concept, that is, which we present regarding ourselves in a social situation – and we want this to be respected by other participants, they should refrain from challenging it, refrain from doing or saying anything that may contradict it; indeed, it is best to express positive feelings towards those things we appreciate.

In the office it is inevitable that staff will threaten the negative face needs of a client: she is requested to follow certain rules and orders, she is asked questions about information she otherwise perhaps would not wish to share, etc. Yet in such an official situation clients are often reminded of things or obligations, are often offered pieces of advice – which also count as threats to their negative face needs. A similar inventory might be created in relation to communicative acts threatening the client's positive face. In the typically neutral atmosphere of an office, positive face needs are very difficult to meet – the client feels much less of an important person than she would expect to in a normal social situation. There are, for example, often smaller or bigger deficiencies in documentation relating to the issue that brought the client to the office – and staff have to draw the client's attention to them. In normal circumstances such acts would count as criticism, something clearly threatening the client's positive face. Politeness is the age-old ritual solution for such dilemmas and conflicts. Brown and Levinson, in their seminal study, proved that languages of very different kinds lead to very similar outcomes, being politeness strategies to manage such situations and keep the face of participants and the expressive order in good health. Their theory can be represented as a decision tree leading participants within the interaction to optimal – or at least feasible – strategies in order to save each other's face. The decision tree follows a route relating to the intensity of the threat to the Hearer's face (FTA stands for Face Threatening Act):



In considering which route to take in the decision tree three factors need to be taken into account, according to Brown and Levinson. The first is the social distance between clerk and client. At the municipal offices of a major district of a big city such a distance is usually quite big, and clerk and client are most likely to be total strangers. Such a social distance will require higher order politeness to save the client's face. At the municipality of a small village this distance is probably smaller, however – and clerk and client may well be acquaintances, or even relatives. This allows for a more informal style, one not threatening the client's face. The second factor here is the power difference between clerk and client. The official position of a clerk lends her some power, something that will make the client resort to a more formal style. The clerk, on the other hand, should not exploit this relationship; she should reciprocate the polite style of the client. Third, is the degree of politeness inherent in particular formulas; each and every language has a rich repertoire of politeness formulas of different degrees from which one might choose.

First of all, the Speaker has to decide whether to do the FTA at all. For instance, there may be some spelling error in the document the client brings along – yet it would threaten her positive face to draw her attention to it, and it is not a serious fault with regard to the purposes of the document; so the polite clerk will decide not to commit FTA.

Nevertheless, in most cases the administrator cannot keep silent about mistakes or has to give a client instructions about whom to turn, what missing data needs to be filled in, and so on - so she cannot help resorting to FTA. Then she next has to decide whether to do the FTA "on record", that is, by an explicit proposition or request or question - or she may choose to go "off the record" by using some kind of implicit communication, for example a hint. If she speaks "on record", she may decide to do the FTA baldly and openly, without any mitigating, redressive action.

This, however, seriously threatens the client's face, so it is acceptable only in very special situations, for example in a case of there being some immediate danger to a client. (For instance, the client is about to hit a table corner, and there is no time for a polite formula.) Otherwise the clerk will always be expected to aim some redressive action to either the positive or the negative face needs of the client. One strategy might be to say something that communicates something existing in common with the client, for instance common group membership. "*For women like us it is always difficult to....*" She can give a positive remark about the client's name, or occupation, or some other thing about her. Another positive politeness strategy is to try to agree with the client as much as possible, and avoid any expression of disagreement. For example, in the case of a mistakenly filled in form, the clerk should avoid plainly stating that it is 'wrong' - she can say that it would indeed be logical to fill in the form in the way the client did, but, in fact, the office expects it to be filled like this and this... The clerk may make some indication that she is taking care of the client's needs: for instance, she might make a remark stating that it must be boring to fill in such a long and detailed form. Or the clerk could show optimism and cooperation: *Let's do it all together* ... There is tremendous number of possible tactics, and with an appropriate frame of mind a clerk can be creative in using a style that supports the client's positive face, or which may even *give* some face to her.

Another possible strategy is to redress the harm that will act as a threat to the negative face requirements of the client – that is, the clerk may indicate that she is quite aware of the obtrusion her act means to the sovereignty of the client. One typical and often applied formula is to be conventionally indirect. For example, instead of saying "*Please go over to room number 16, on the left in the corridor*", she can say "*Can you go over, please, ...*" Of course she *can*, yet by putting this question this way the clerk is indicating that she does not want to force the client to do something she may not want to. Another way to avoid the appearance of obtrusion is to express pessimism: "*I think it may be a bit tiresome for you to go over to room number 16, on the left in the corridor...*" This is rather too polite in a normal clerical relationship, but if the client is someone of high status it could be an adequate solution. Also, the clerk can choose to mitigate the obtrusion by indicating that the requested action on the part of the client needs a minimum of effort: "*You need to take just a few steps to room number 16, on the left in the corridor.*" Another frequently used gesture to save the client's negative face is to apologize: "*I really don't want to get rid of you and send you on your way, but it's my colleague in room 16, on the left in the corridor, who is best in settling such issues...*"

A typical and not always nice strategy in avoiding face threatening is to make the communication impersonal – the clerk can resort to an impersonal, bureaucratic style, by which she can create a distance between herself and the content of her verbal delivery. "*The regulation of our office prescribes that you should take your problem to our colleague in room 16, on the left in the corridor,*" or "*These kinds of cases are delegated to our colleague in room 16, on the left in the corridor*" – which is a kind of depersonalization by a linguistic means of nominalisation.

Finally, there is an option for the clerk to go "off the record" and avoid any explicit FTA. This strategy is less common, being typical only in situations where a client is known to be much higher in status than the clerk. Threatening the face of a high-status person will require much more redress than would be connected to a person of about the same level as the clerk. Yet to do her official job, she must use the FTA – and in such cases creative communication can provide an arsenal of off-record tactics. The main source of such tactics is linguistic pragmatics. Paul Grice (1975) formulated the Cooperative Principle, and four maxims that can be deduced from it. The Cooperative Principle: Make your conversational contribution as is required and when it occurs with the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

The maxims following on from this principle are the:

Maxim of quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of quality:

3. Do not say what you believe to be false.
4. Do not say anything for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of relation: Be relevant.

Maxim of manner:

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Be orderly.

(Grice 1975, pp. 45-46)

Via one unique way in which one might violate such maxims comes an important act for indirect communication: the conversational implicature. XXX

WORD OK? One can exploit a maxim by blatantly failing to fulfil it – that is, the violation is made explicit by the speaker for the benefit of the hearer. By this, the hearer is made to look for and find some inference that will make the message relevant, despite the blatant violation of the cooperative communication maxim. This is the pragmatic basis of the "off-record" strategies of politeness.

For example, the clerk can give the client a hint concerning what to do without providing any explicit instruction: "*We have an excellent colleague in room 16, on the left in the corridor, who is a real expert in such a case...*" This strategy relies on exploiting the maxim of relevance. Or the clerk may choose to exploit the maxim of quantity in order to be indirect: "*Well, a difficult problem is a difficult problem. I'm afraid, you'll have to consult our colleague in room 16, on the left in the corridor.*" Via tautology, the first part of the utterance is exploitation of the maxim of quantity. Or a clerk might exploit the maxim of quality by posing, for instance, a rhetorical question: "*I wonder who the expert in such cases here is!? Perhaps you could consult our colleague in room 16, on the left in the corridor...*" Or, finally, the clerk might be ambiguous in exploiting the maxim of manner: "*I wonder if we have any experience in such cases...? You could consult our colleague in room 16, on the left in the corridor...*"

In summary, we have here endeavoured to show that the social relationship between a member of office staff and a client is asymmetrical – thus it is inherent in any situation that the face of the client will be under threat. A client-centred office might be expected to take measures to compensate for this face-threatening situation. Based on the classic work of Erving Goffman, and his followers Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, we have put forward some pragmatic ideas for consideration as well as communication techniques that could enable an office's style to ensure that clients do not lose face when they confront an office bureaucratic apparatus.

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Katalin Pallai

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO DEALING WITH COMMUNITY CONFLICTS AND DISPUTES. Part 1 – Suggesting a Consistent Taxonomy

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods in local communities and governance is a relatively new phenomenon – both in general and particularly in Hungary and in Central Europe. Their introduction and use is supported by the European Commission, as they are deeply democratic, effective and often faster processes than formal (court based) litigation processes.

Actuality and relevance of the paper is given by the fact that the ADR professionals who work in the new countries obtained their education in different countries, schools and on different languages, they often use different terminologies that create a cacophony for the innocent observer. Moreover, the overlaps and contradictions in the terminology is often also connected with conceptual confusion. The two chapters attempt to put some order into this cacophony, by comparing principles underlying key methods of working and key differences within processes, and by identifying possible meanings for key words. It also makes a suggestion for a simple and coherent taxonomy of the most oft-used methods.

Dispute resolution

Parties to disputes or ones in a situation of conflict are able to choose from among many different ways to solve their dispute. They can have discussions, and come to some form of agreement, ask a third party to assist them in their negotiations or to make a decision instead of them, or they can use force to defend their claimed position or interest.

When we move on the continuum from one end point – "free choice of solutions through direct communication among the parties" – towards the other – "imposed solutions" – the power of leverage of parties regarding the outcome decreases; often, their level of satisfaction with the process and its result also shows a reduction. In most cases, when disputing parties are not able to generate a solution to a problem by themselves – that is, to agree on something – but resort to arbitration, to adjudication or perhaps to force, such processes seriously damage their relations. The process often lasts a long time, engenders frustration, and in the end at least one party is likely to remain dissatisfied with the imposed solution.

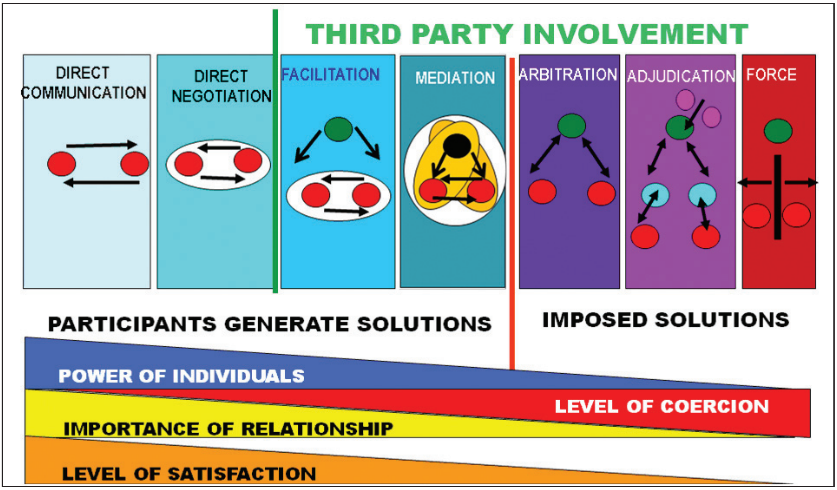

Figure 1: Dispute resolution strategies

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) refers to processes and techniques applied in an effort to resolve conflicts/disputes outside that of a judicial process.[1] The other common characteristic of ADR methods is that they are peaceful processes available for use by disagreeing parties so that such parties can come to a mutually accepted agreement. The term's usage varies in different countries and organizations: in this collective term different sets of methods[2] belong from negotiation to arbitration. Among these processes, some may be implemented with the help of a third party, and some without such assistance.

In this paper I have as my focus mediation and restorative justice processes – the two ADR methods that are most widely used in resolving community disputes. The attraction of both methods is in their principled underpinning; they both imply a deep belief in the right and capacity of individuals to make informed and responsible decisions about their own lives when adequate conditions have been created. They both create possibilities for freedom: freedom to speak, to drop masks, to be present as humans, reveal and struggle for aspirations, acknowledge mistakes and responsibility, and act in accordance with core values.[3] In both processes a neutral (or non-partisan) third person (facilitator or mediator) will support the stakeholders in their joint learning and problem solving – and in their quest for a mutually agreeable solution to a problem.

While ADR methods have many commonalities in their basic principles and ideologies, there is also a wide variety of ADR approaches – i.e. directions and, indeed, whole schools – that have developed many legitimate and valid approaches as regards supporting parties when in conflict. The abundance of options is positive – though its problematic corollary is a degree of chaos as far as the innocent observer is concerned. The fact that different approaches may use the same terms to describe partly overlapping methods or very different processes and rituals could well create confusion for anybody not entirely familiar with the field. This paper thus aims to put some order into this cacophony, too, by comparing principles underlying key methods of working and key differences within processes, and by identifying possible meanings for key words. It also makes a suggestion for a simple taxonomy of the most oft-used methods and also reflects on some of the challenges facing professionals. At the same time, this short paper is unable to offer any detailed explanations or act as a substitute for the reading of more substantive texts on methodologies that might fall within the sphere of interest of the reader.

The fact that application of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods in local communities and governance is a relatively new phenomenon - both in general and particularly in Hungary and in Central Europe – gives impetus to this attempt. Here, when ADR is new it is possible to introduce a *coherent* terminology, thereby avoiding situations prevailing in countries where ADR practices have roots in different sources and a parallel growth has occurred, resulting in an overlapping use of terms. At the same time, there is also a risk here coming from a chaotic use of terminology; for we do have trained mediators, persons emanating from different disciplines and schools, though they may be familiar solely with one area of the ADR field, so their instinctive use of terms will be likely to differ. If we agreed upon a coherent terminology, it would make all professionals' and users' lives simpler.

The other component for the actual relevance of the topic is on the users' side. We have some decision-makers who have heard of methods and a few who have experienced its functioning, too. Probably, both groups could benefit from having a review of methods and from clarification of the meanings of terms.

Finally, a closing comment of relevance: ADR in community disputes necessarily involves stakeholder participation. They are deliberative multi-stakeholder processes. As such, they may well be opportunities for both decision-makers and local communities to experience what participation in fact means and how beneficial it can be. My deepest hope is that successful multi-stakeholder ADR processes will be able to support the emergence of more participatory local governance in our region.

Simple cases and types of process[4]

When we refer to community conflicts and disputes, many different things come to mind. There are conflicts among the rational interests of individuals or groups of stakeholders – for example, a conflict between a restaurant owner's satisfaction with her/his happy clients and neighbors' frustration with the noise; or a dispute between developers and the old users of an area when looking at a new development project; or conflicts among stakeholder positions in well-known NIMBY[5] cases. These are all rational conflicts among positions and interests. We call them symmetrical, as parties are assumed to be on a level moral playing field, thus can be considered equal parties in the negotiations.[6] In such cases, parties seeking a solution can decide to directly discuss the options, call in a mediator, or go to court within the framework of a civil law case. If their choice is mediation, the mediator attempts to assist parties to explore needs and interests and achieve a mutually agreeable solution to the disputed issue or problem. The mediator will try to lead the quarreling parties towards collaborative problem solving and help them to create value ("expand the pie") by adopting an interest or needs-based frame of reference. (Fisher-Ury-Patton, 1991) The principle underlying such an approach is that unearthing a greater number of the actual needs of the parties will create more possible solutions because not all requirements will be mutually exclusive; as not all individuals value the same things in the same way, exploitation of differential or complementary needs can produce a wider variety of solutions which more closely meet the parties' needs. (Menkel Medow, 1984) It is the duty of the mediator to establish a "safe place" for negotiations. This means maintaining mutual respect among the parties whilst leading the process in constructive communication that allows effective problem solving till an agreed solution is achieved.

Different types of wrongdoings and crime that breach community norms and/or laws can be equally treated as community conflicts. Examples that come to mind are either the case of a teenager who breaks into a house to rob it and comes up against the home owner[7], or a conflict between the community and a group harming community assets[8]. The major difference in this second pair of conflicts from the first is that the parties are not on a symmetrical moral playing field, for, here, one party causes harm by breaching laws and/or norms, while the other party is a victim of an offense. If such a case is handled by the judicial system, it is judged according to penal law and the offender faces punishment; yet when a case goes through a restorative justice procedure, the focus shifts from retribution to the needs of the stakeholder. With restorative logic, reconciliation is more important and beneficial for the persons involved and the community than to have a member who is punished. The victim(s)[9] needs healing, empowerment and restitution, and the offender needs reintegration into the community; and a necessary condition for this is that the offender takes responsibility for his/her wrongdoing. This gives an opportunity for healing and restitution for the victim and reintegration of the offender. (Zehr 2005) The role of the facilitator in the restorative process is to create a safe place where victim(s) and offender(s) can engage in a dialogue that personalizes the event, and creates mutual empathy and understanding, realization of the impact of the offense and taking responsibility by the offender: the conditions for reconciliation and healing. (Fellegi 2009)

The restorative process can take various forms and dramaturgies. One often applied form is the restorative circle, which may also be seen as a form that best captures the essence of the process. It foreshadows the purpose and positive outcome of the process: the respect offered to all parties in the process, and the intention of regaining balance and reintegrating the wrongdoer. "The physical form of the Circle symbolizes shared leadership, equality, connection, and inclusion. It also promotes focus, accountability, and participation from all." (Parnis: 2005: 11)

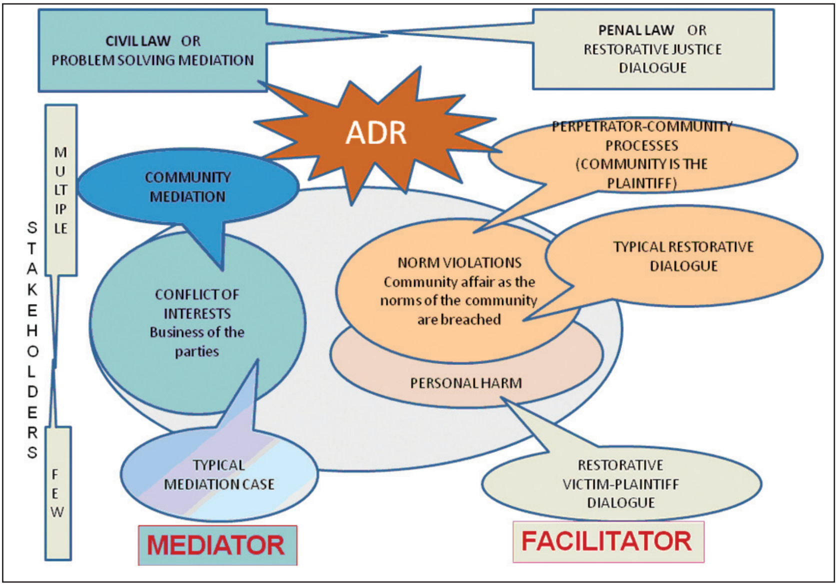

Figure 2: Taxonomy of simple cases and methods

Figure 2 above summarizes the key characteristics of the two processes and shows the use of terms I suggest. Here, for the processes that would fall under civic law in the judicial process, the term “mediation” is thus used; and the third party who assists in the process is called the “mediator”. For the processes that fall under penal law in the judicial process, the term “restorative justice dialogue” is used, and the third party who provides assistance is called the “facilitator”.

Such clarification is needed because the terms in the chart and other key words used in dispute resolution processes often cover very different things and have overlapping meanings in their use in the literature and by practitioners.[10] In many countries (e.g. Germany), Victim-Offender Mediation is the most used term for the restorative processes. In the wider restorative literature, the term “mediation” is equally used for restorative processes. A leading restorative justice practitioner suggested a couple of years ago replacing the “mediation” term by the term “conferencing” or “dialogue” to create a distinction. (Zehr 2005: 9) This is a legitimate idea, as conferencing is a method most widely used in restorative processes and dialogue is the most essential part of the process. However, many conference methods are also widely used in multi-stakeholder planning and interest-based conflict resolution processes. In these processes, as with restorative justice processes, the ‘conference’ means only a format for multi-stakeholder meetings, i.e. a tool for organizing the negotiation process. Nevertheless, the term “conference method” is often used to replace the term ‘multi-stakeholder mediation’ or planning. In view of all these factors – and going a step further than Zehr – I would suggest utilizing restorative dialogue as a generic term for the restorative processes as dialogue captures not only the form but the *essence* of the process; at the same time, it allows one to create a clear distinction from interest-based mediation procedures.

This proposal introduces a more logical and consistent usage of words than the existing one. It identifies the two processes according to their essence and not the tools applied. The starting point for this distinction is a comparison of the key modes of communication in the two processes. While mediation is a negotiation between parties to find a mutually agreeable solution, the restorative process is a deep, complex, and often moving dialogue between the parties via which they are able to look at experiences, feelings and identities. Different methods are used to promote such processes. “To promote a dialogue, we must facilitate conversation, … to promote successful negotiation, we must mediate proposals for action.” (Forester: 2009:7) The mode of communication is the essential distinguishing characteristic between the two processes. Consequently, it is logical to term the symmetrical interest dispute ‘mediation’ and the restorative communication a ‘dialogue’. Accordingly, negotiation is led by a mediator and dialogue by the facilitator. With this logic, all interest-based negotiation processes should be called 'mediation', independently of the number of stakeholders involved; and restorative justice processes should be called 'dialogue'. The same logic might be applied in making a distinction between mediator and facilitator.

This distinction is simple and clear in simple cases that clearly fall into one or the other process – as with the cases mentioned above. However, there are cases that fall in between, involving both interest and norm conflicts and/or the breaching of some community norms, or laws. We will see later, in the second part of these twin chapters[11], during a discussion of complex cases, that there are also many local conflicts that do not fall into either of the two simple categories but which have various components rooted in interest-, value- and identity-differences. The resolution process pertaining to such conflicts often needs to be long (and complicated), and third party professionals need to merge different approaches. The distinction made above still helps, though, as when planning such processes, understanding, distinguishing between modes and then consciously applying the different modes of communication is of crucial importance. (Forester 2009: 77-91)

The generic process and the role of the third party

By generic process I mean the main components of both processes. The first duty of a mediator or facilitator who is involved in the conflict is to assess it. Assessment often starts with interviews to gather information about the case, determining whether intervention is needed and feasible, and what type of process should be initiated. The main questions in this phase are: what the nature of the conflict is, whether the parties need support and are willing to participate and are capable of constructively participating, and whether the risk of causing more trouble or harm can be minimized. If the professional conducting the assessment and convening is the one who will lead the process, she/he can also make use of these first steps to build a relationship with stakeholders and create trust in that she/he is able to create a safe environment for the resolution process.[12]

The next step is to prepare the parties for their involvement by explaining the process and its rules, and to convene a meeting of parties. When the parties are groups, it has to be determined whether everybody will take part or some form of representation should be organized in relation to specific groups.

The next phase is the actual process: the mediation or restorative dialogue. During such a meeting, the role of the mediator/facilitator is to create a safe environment (safe place) where the parties respect each other, listen to the others' messages, claims, feelings and ideas and a process of learning and understanding can be built up among the stakeholders. The other duty of the mediator/facilitator is to assist the parties in their navigating towards exploring, learning and agreement, thus in attaining a successful working process. She/he has to keep an eye on creative possibilities and practical propositions raised during the dialogue which satisfy the other party's interest(s) and on mutually beneficial options and possible agreements. (Stulberg-Love, 2008)

This is what the role of the mediator and facilitator have in common. Beyond this, they have slightly different roles, owing to the partly different purposes adhering to the procedures. The purpose of mediation is to negotiate an interest-based solution. Mediators focus not only on interests but on exploring parties' differences in priorities as well, as such differences may be able to maximize the joint benefits ("expanding the pie") and lead to win-win outcomes. The purpose of the restorative process is reconciliation. For this, facilitators need to focus on how the process can personalize harm and understanding, and note when signals of responsibility taking, support, reconciliation and healing appear. (Fellegi 2009: 94-95)

At the end, when the parties arrive at an agreement the mediator/facilitator can help formulate such an agreement and assist in the organization of the monitoring of implementation.

As we can see, there is a similar sequence in the two processes (assessment -> convening -> learning of parties -> negotiation of parties -> agreement of parties -> monitoring of implementation of the agreement). The intensity of the work of the ADR professional can be different in the different phases. Often, restorative professionals work more intensively in the preparatory phases and attempt to intervene less in the dialogue among the parties. In mediation, different schools exist: some mediators do not meet the parties before the mediation meeting in simple cases, while others do meet the parties and use the assessment and convening phases for relation building.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES AND ROLE PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIATORS/FACILITATORS

Although the generic process is one held in common, there are many different approaches that assign different roles to the mediator/facilitator. The most typical taxonomy is to distinguish evaluative, facilitative and transformative approaches. Professionals belonging to the evaluative school have a role perception that includes providing direction and signaling the appropriate grounds for settlement. They typically read all relevant documents before meetings and work only in cases where they have professional expertise. Facilitative professionals consider the principal mission of their job to enhance and clarify communication. They find it inappropriate to express opinions or make predictions; and they do not necessarily read all documents before meetings and do not restrict themselves to cases where they have professional expertise. (Riskin, 1994)

The transformative schools go beyond the facilitative approach in distancing third parties from problem solving. They see conflict as a form of interactional degeneration and claim that the purpose of the resolution process is to change the quality of conflict interaction - and, via this, to reverse the negative conflict cycle. Their main goal is transformation of the relationship among parties that happens through support being given to recognition, perspective taking and empowerment. Some adhering to the transformative direction completely reject problem solving as a goal. (Bush-Folger, 1994) The role of the mediator/facilitator in this approach is to concentrate on the opportunities that arise during the process for empowerment and inter-party recognition as they may strengthen the parties' capacity for self-determination and responsiveness. (Bush-Folger, 1996) Some anthropologists and sociologists even argue for a therapeutic style of operations – a process focusing on the full expression of feelings and attitudes, and also on self-enforcement. (Silbery, 1986)

The three approaches mentioned above create a clear continuum according to the level of involvement of the mediator/facilitator in the conflict content. At one end stands the evaluative approach, with its possible involvement in decisions; the facilitative is in the centre, maintaining a distance from direct involvement in decision-making; and at the other end are the transformative approaches that not only stipulate a withdrawal from involvement but also shift the focus from content to relationship. This concept of transformative dispute resolution consistently fits in with the taxonomy that is widely used by trainings and introductory books related to ADR.

Yet there is another concept of the transformative approach that is applied both by mediators and facilitators and which does not fit in with the earlier continuum. This second transformative concept is defined not by the intensity of third party involvement in problem solving but by having a wider focus. Mediators and facilitators using this approach work not only with the actual presentation of the conflict and its solution but also include the wider context in the analysis. Their aim is to enhance parties understanding of the *whole* situation, as they claim that the wider picture can help the parties shape creative and mutually rewarding longer-term and also more substantial solutions, ones that have a chance of creating stability. (Friedman-Himmelstein 2005) I will explore this path in more detail in the second part of these twin papers. (Pallai: Participatory Approaches to Dealing with Community Conflicts and Disputes. Part 2. – Participatory Processes for Complex Cases.)

Closing words

The taxonomy above is artificial and abstract. The purpose of its introduction was to take a look at the basic considerations, differentiate simple polar cases, and examine main options and approaches; in addition, such differentiation has been used to define key terms clearly, while avoiding multiple uses of basic terms. I saw it as important to do this as the terms we use have an effect on the concepts that structure our understanding. Clarity and consistency in one will be able to help the other.

Though feeling satisfied with this newly-gained clarity, we should not forget that life is much messier than this simple taxonomy. Conflicts and professionals cannot be so neatly encased in boxes. Cases mix components, and professionals apply a mix of methods. Good professionals have principles that dictate an inclination towards one approach, though they may also understand all the other options and select the one most suitable for a presented situation. Conceptual clarity helps one make the adequate choices.

To see more of the most difficult challenges for local decision-makers and ADR professionals, after this review of the key concepts I suggest that one reads the second part of these twin chapters, the one discussing complex challenges and intervention options. (Pallai: Participatory Approaches to Dealing with Community Conflicts and Disputes. Part 2. – Participatory Processes for Complex Cases.)

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Documentary films

The Woolf Within http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1s6wKeGLQk
Burning bridges http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaeeRwOJQng

Notes

1 The word 'alternative' in ADR refers to an alternative to formal litigation at court.

2 What processes ADR covers may be different as regards source: some countries/different organizations may use a range of taxonomies, e.g. UNODC taxonomy includes arbitration, mediation and conciliation in ADR methods, USAID includes negotiation, while Wikipedia has within it collaborative law.

3 This sentence is based on a beautiful paragraph written by Kay Pranis on Peacemaking Circles. It is not quoted but has been adapted to the purpose. (Parnis, 2005: 11)

4 'Simple' here means cases that have two characteristics: (1) they relatively clearly fit into the generic situation for rational interest conflict or norm-breaching, and (2) they are episodic in the sense that the context does not reproduce them on a regular basis, or they can at a minimum be isolated and dealt with in a short time, as separate cases.

5 NIMBY is the acronym for “Not In My Backyard” types of urban problem. These are conflicts when most stakeholders accept the need for intervention or implementation of a project (e.g. a road or incinerator), but nobody wants such a thing to be built close to his/her property (i.e. in his/her own backyard).

6 Here, symmetry refers only to their equal moral status. It may happen that their negotiating power or skills are very different, though this is a process management challenge and does not determine the *type* of process.

7 The Clint Eastwood movie, Grand Torino, beautifully depicts such a case and the follow-up restoration process; or the short movie The Woolf Within provides a record of restorative justice treatment within such a case. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1s6wKeGLQk

8 The documentary Burning Bridges covers a restorative process initiated after such community asset damage. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaeeRwOJQng

9 According to restorative logic, the obvious victim may be a person, a group or the whole community. In all cases, as secondary victim the communities may also be affected as their norms are breached and their sense of community damaged.

10 Even the sources listed in the reference list display this variety in the use of terms, e.g. Connor et al (1999) use the terms conferencing/facilitation, while the CIDA 2004 publication calls the same process 'mediation' and the third party the 'mediator' while referring to the same process.

11 I am calling this chapter and the other chapter written by the same author twin chapters as they are both written about community conflicts and disputes. Although they look into different kinds of conflicts - and can be read separately - the second chapter can also be seen as a more complex discussion built on the terminology developed in this paper.

12 Notwithstanding this possible benefit, some authoritative experts argue for a separation of the conveying role. e.g. Susskind and Cruikshank (1987) argue for separation.

13 An interesting debate was running on this topic on Linkedin during the summer of 2011. Many good positions can be read on the Linkedin site: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/How-do-you-structure-your-935617.S.61844951?view=&srchtype=discussedNews&gid=935617&item=61844951&type=member&trk=eml-anet_dig-b_pd-ttl-cn&ut=0ylSv1EMbJQQY1

Katalin Pallai

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO DEALING WITH COMMUNITY CONFLICTS AND DISPUTES. Part 2 – Participatory Processes for Complex Cases

This chapter can be taken as the second part of the paper written by the same author on ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) terminology. In the first paper, basic ADR approaches were analysed. The common characteristic of ADR methods is that all operate with the inclusion and active participation of all stakeholders involved in a conflict situation. As such, they are participatory methodologies – they establish a special group of participatory processes.

In order to build up a basic understanding of conflict resolution, it was useful to first take a look at simple cases of local conflicts and at the ADR methods in their generic form. The entry point, in the first of these twin chapters, was a discussion of simple cases. I used the term 'simple cases' for cases that had two characteristics: one is that they relatively clearly fit in with the generic situation in relation to rational interest conflict or norm-breaching; the other was that they are episodic in the sense that the context may not reproduce them on a regular basis (or they can at least be isolated) and they may be dealt with in a relatively short time, as separate cases.

In the field of local governance most conflicts are complex and recurrent. They have many different facets and are often inseparable from the context generating them. The histories of groups/individuals who are parties to an encounter or within socio-political-economic structures can play a big role in conflict escalation. This condition can limit short-term and episode-focused interventions as regards impact. For example, in cases when regularly repeated earlier offenses or cultural differences of groups lead to increasing frustration, and finally to a violent clash, even for a limited intervention a more complicated process is needed than the simple process discussed in the first part of the paper. (Cordell-Wolff 2010) When relations among groups sharing a place is asymmetrical, it can easily happen that parties see the same event in a different way (e.g. the arrest of a minority member for a petty crime), for they embed it in different 'stories'. In such conflicts, without an apt third party's intervention, they often do not have any opportunity, trust or the capacity to share these stories; and it is the role of the facilitator to design a process that creates a safe place where parties can reveal where they are 'operating from' and assist the process via which their points of reference can be at least understood – and from where reconciliation may come. Or, in a regulatory conflict (e.g. land use or the use of symbols), where in a diverse environment the source of conflict is a difference in the values and identities of constituent groups, it would be misleading to simplify the case as a rational interest problem; in such cases interests and utility are part of the conflict, though identities and histories also play an important role. (Forester 2009)

Values and interests are very different elements of a conflict: while interests can be satisfied, negotiated or even traded, deeply felt values, identities or injustices need to be recognized and respected. They are non-tradable. Our values and our identities develop through a process of complex interplay with a context. We cannot negotiate or change these easily.[1] If some of our deeply-felt ways of operating need to be sacrificed, they need to be mourned before being released. In such situations, if an insensitive mediator pushes a simple interest-based trading process, it may antagonize some parties.

The professional entering into such situations is faced with a difficult question: is it possible to deal with the episode while isolating it from relations? Or does the process have to enter into the complex domain of relations so as to get a stable outcome? If the second option is selected, creative solutions and longer dialogue are often necessary to explore the encounter and arrive at a solution. These are transformative conflict-resolution processes, where relations between groups (through their histories, values or identities) are a key component of conflict resolution; yet in most cases we can still see them as particular conflicts with identifiable boundaries.

An even more difficult situation is when segregation, exclusion, unjust treatment or group-specific deprivation has created the background to the conflict, that is, when elements of the socio-economic-political context produce a situation where conflict is recurrent. In such cases an equally legitimate question (as in the cases mentioned beforehand) is whether conflict episodes might be isolated and resolved as episodes – or whether transformation of the generating social-economic-political structure on its own might bring lasting change. The difference between the two situations is that besides personal relations the structures framing the context also play an important role in generating the conflict. With such conflicts we have already left the domain of conflict resolution, and we enter into a different domain, that of conflict transformation.

Conflict transformation

For a discussion of complex urban conflicts a clear distinction between conflict resolution and conflict transformation can help the development of a precise language and a clear conceptual framework. Conflict resolution is a process focusing on the content of and a possible solution to an existing crisis, while conflict transformation is a more complex approach, framing the conflict as a situation engendered by underlying socio-economic and political structures. It aims at constructive change that includes, and goes beyond, resolving specific problems. Conflict transformation reverses the focus of conflict resolution: it sees conflict not as the job, but as an entry point to a constructive change process for the wider structure. One of its founders expresses this in the following way: "the key to transformation is a proactive bias toward seeing conflict as a potential catalyst for growth." (Lederach 2003:15)

Table 1: A Brief Comparison of Perspectives of Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation (source: Lederach, 2003: 33)

	Conflict Resolution Perspective	**Conflict Transformation Perspective**
THE KEY QUESTION	How do we end something not desired?	How do we end something destructive and build something desired?
THE FOCUS	It is content-centered.	It is relationship-centered.
THE PURPOSE	To achieve an agreement and solution to the presented problem creating the crisis.	To promote constructive change processes, inclusive of, but not limited to, immediate solutions.
THE PROCESS	It is embedded and built around the immediacy of the relationship where the symptoms of disruptions appear.	It envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity for response to symptoms and engagement of systems within which relationships are embedded.
TIME FRAME	The horizon is short-term relief to pain, anxiety and difficulties	The horizon is mid-to-long-range and is intentionally crisis-responsive rather than crisis-driven.
VIEW OF CONFLICT	It envisions the need to de-escalate conflict processes.	It envisions conflict as an ecology that is relationally dynamic with ebb (conflict de-escalation to pursue constructive change) and flow (conflict escalation to pursue constructive change)

The role of the transformative professional is to analyze not only the immediate situation but to look at it as a particular conflict episode that is embedded in underlying patterns, developing "a conceptual framework that holds these perspectives together, one that permits us to connect presented problems with the deeper relational patterns. Such a framework can provide an overall understanding of the conflict, while creating a platform to address both the presented issues and the changes needed at the level of deeper relational patterns." (Lederach 2003:11)

The transformationist approaches to conflict resolution (already mentioned) and this approach are similar in that conflict is rooted in the quality of the relationship of the parties. The key difference between the two approaches is that in the conflict transformation concept the "relations have two dimensions: our face-to face interactions and the ways we structure our social, political, economic and cultural relationships." (Lederach 2003: 21) The second dimension of power relations is what makes the difference: conceptualization of the conflict goes beyond the interpersonal level and includes the structural dimensions of the wider context.

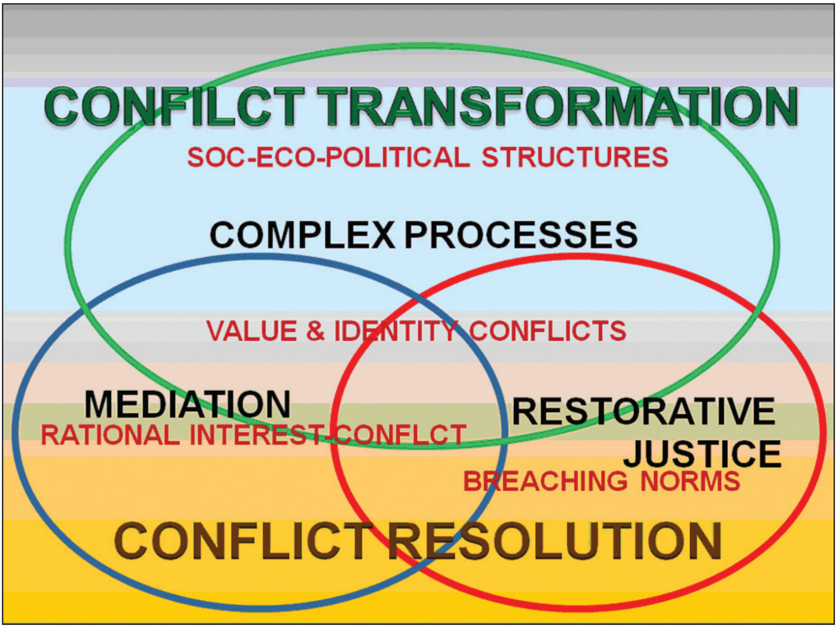

Figure 3: Conflicts and approaches

Conflict transformation and local governance

Conflict transformation aims to initiate transformation for both the interactions of parties and the ways their social, political, economic and cultural relationships are structured – this second part goes beyond conflict resolution and greatly overlaps with the domain of local governance.

Since Giddens' theory local government professionals initiating stakeholder-based, collaborative processes recognise that the underlying structure and the personal relations of parties involved in a conflict exist in a mutually constitutive relationship. Yet we must also see that in the situations mentioned above (segregation, exclusion, deprivation) and in most urban conflicts structure plays a key role – the power of the structure is often far beyond the agency power of the parties; it also has an asymmetrical effect on the different parties' powers. Thus, stakeholder-based processes need to face up to two crucial challenges: one is that process design and management has to somehow deal with the positional asymmetry of the parties involved, while the second is that a crucial component in conflict transformation is aimed at structural intervention. This second challenge leads us beyond ADR processes to local policies and local governance structures[2] – to the study of those social and political structures where the context of interpersonal and inter-group encounters is generated.

Not only ADR experts but local policy professionals also use the "transformative term" for transformative processes and policies. Transformative policies aim at correcting problems and inequitable outcomes by analyzing and correcting the underlying generative framework (i.e. the structures and earlier policies that have generated them). This transformative policy process needs to be coordinated with conflict resolution activities in order to create a conflict transformation result.

The professional's role in complex cases

In complex cases the distinction between mediation and restorative processes is useless. The professional leading the process must possess the skills of both. Lawrence Susskind, a guru of multi-stakeholder urban processes, calls such professionals "facilitative leaders". (Susskind, 2006) Their job is to establish deliberative democratic processes that recognize and respect plurality and difference. (Forester, 2009) During such processes professionals need to recognize different values, interests and power relations, and to often anticipate structured biases related to ethnicity, culture, class, gender and any other differences that may play a role. They should also explore how structures effect situations and where problem or conflict boundaries might be established. They can then achieve a safe place where claims and feelings – even negative feelings and anger – can be expressed only on the basis of having this awareness.

Most commentators agree that in a complex situation, where values and identities also play a role, the oft-mentioned neutrality of the third party is a fiction (Forester, 2009: 35) Forester, after examining the work of many professionals working in diverse environments, states that "they make few claims to neutrality, but many to serving all parties in a non-partisan way. 'Facilitative leaders' work proactively to enable well-informed decisions by parties may level the playing field of pre-existing inequalities of information and access to relevant expertise, and more." (Forester, 2009: 5) They are "committed not to specific outcomes or parties but to the generative quality of the deliberative process and mutually crafted agreements." (Forester, 2009)

In some complex cases, as noted above, the conflict boundary goes beyond the actual conflict situation. For any lasting solution a transformative process has to be initiated that changes part of the structure generating the conflicts. This is an interdisciplinary form of work: part of it can be facilitated within the framework of a deliberative process, while other parts may come from the results of work from other supporting local governance professions and/or political decisions. The "transformative professionals" who can lead the design and implementation of such transformative processes need to have expertise in both the ADR and local governance fields and to have the competence to bring together routes involved in the overall transformative process.

The professional challenge

Most local conflicts are not isolated episodes that escalate once – and, if solved, will never occur again; nor are they cases where the underlying social and political structure produces a regular outburst of conflict episodes. Most cases one comes across in the field are in between. In different cases the strength of connections between context and a specific episode are different.

Third party professionals are, in most cases, invited to look at the episode, as it is this episode that breaks through the tolerance threshold of community members or decision-makers; it is the episode that makes stakeholders realize that they do not want to live with it. Stakeholders typically tend to frame situations as relatively isolated conflict cases. When we begin to analyze such a situation, in the background we often see that it is not an accident – a more complex web of relations can be sensed and are revealed.

Always a challenge for the mediator/facilitator is how she/he frames the presented problem in the given situation, how deeply he/she attempts to explore it, how she/he frames it for her/his own understanding and how she/he frames it in relation to the process that she/he is to initiate. It is often not a free decision. The possibilities with the context may limit what is the possible farming.

The professional has to adjust the goals and approaches to the possibilities being offered by the local context. Possibilities are limited by two key factors. One is the condition of the stakeholders: what their starting point is and how much are they willing to make sacrifices for possible improvements. The other factor is what is possible at all: what are the components within the leverage power of local stakeholders and what is beyond it. In many cases a major component of the engendering structure is beyond local control. And it is the task of the professional involved to explore or judge how much of the context can be brought into case resolution and to see whether it is wise to undertake the possible intervention.

Given these conditions we should try to do an honest job in supporting the stakeholder, though there are no clear rules for such decisions. It is the responsibility of all professionals to make these decisions for themselves. A wider professional horizon (at least covering the domain captured here) is something that is necessary for the making of such decisions.

Conclusions

In the first part of the twin papers I presented the basic logic of ADR processes and discussed the simplest forms of mediation and restorative justice processes. These processes in their simplest forms can be used for the resolution of relatively isolated conflicts (conflict episodes). In the first part I suggested differentiating the terminology, using mediation/mediator for the interest-based processes and restorative dialogue/facilitator for reconciliation processes related to committed harm and norm-breaching. (Mediator and facilitator are two distinct professional competencies, and often different professionals.)The obvious challenge for decision-makers faced with relatively simple cases is to understand the case and invite professionals who possess the adequate expertise to help.

In the second part of this study I have looked at complex community conflicts as illustrations of more challenging situations. The cases mentioned in the two parts are at the two ends of a scale – from the simplest to the most complicated. In discussing the complex cases I introduced a distinction between conflict resolution and transformation. Conflict resolution concerning interventions focused on dealing with a presented conflict; while conflict transformation may be used for complex cases where episode and the engendering structure need to be treated together for a sustainable solution. In relation to complex cases, two new terms were introduced for the professional: one was the "facilitative leader" who, according to Susskind, can head a complex deliberative dispute resolution process that may well include interest, value, identity and/or norm conflict; the second was the "transformative professional", someone who can design and head a complex transformative process where ADR and local governance professionals should work together to gain a sustainable solution.

Discussion of these different types of community dispute and challenges, differentiation of the four types of professional, and the necessary components of their competencies is absolutely necessary if we want to take a key principle of ADR seriously, namely: Do not create more harm!

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Notes

1 This statement and the explanation that follows are based on a social constructivist concept of identity - not only because this is the most prevalent conceptualization of identity formation in state-of-the-art identity policy but also because an essentialist concept would not leave room for such discussion, or, indeed, any transformative intervention at all.

2 It leads beyond local governance, too.

3 In the public policy field, "transformative" is antithetical to affirmative policy. Affirmative policies are policies aiming at correcting frustrations felt by groups or inequitable outcomes of earlier policies. They focus on specific policy outcomes and attempt to find some remedy for a given outcome without deeper analysis or intervention into the underlying policy framework that generated the situation. In approach, affirmative policies are similar to short conflict resolution interventions that focus on the immediate conflict episode. Both often lead to specific changes but do not amend more complex situations or the structures that have created them. Transformative policies aim at correcting problems and inequitable outcomes by analyzing and correcting the underlying generative framework. Transformative processes are complex,

mid-to-long term processes. Regarding participation, for example, short-term, project-based interventions contrast with institutionalized modes of participation that have a transformative character. (Gaventa, 2008, Pallai, 2010)

Roberto Grandi

CULTURAL PLANNING, CITY MARKETING AND CREATIVE CITIES: BOLOGNA – FROM CULTURAL CITY TO CREATIVE CITY?

The transition from the public urban cultural policies to cultural planning strategies in Europe is considered within the framework of the regeneration of cities process, which took place from 1990.
This topic is considered from both a theoretical and a more empirical point of view. From the theoretical point of view, the article focuses on the implications of the category of 'creative city'; while from the empirical perspective, the article analyzes the consequences of the development of cultural policies in the Italian city of Bologna.

Public urban cultural policies in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s

Until the **early 1970s**, the public cultural policies of the States that had until 1989 represented Western Europe were characterised by a definition of **culture** that solely considered those works that were defined as being "high culture." The main aim of the public initiatives of those years consisted in promoting the enjoyment of these works by means of an enlargement of access to a public audience that had until then been excluded, above all for economic, cultural and social reasons.

From the mid-1970s until the 1980s there was a dissemination of decentralisation policies, including cultural ones, and an increase in initiatives aimed at increasing citizens' political and social participation in decision-making processes. It was a period known as the '**season of participation and access'**, and it affected many sectors of public life. Public cultural initiatives were presented in a non-homogeneous way in the various European States that had a definition of culture that envisaged a rigid distinction between "high" and "low" culture. Cultural policy became an aspect of public social life with the objective of reconstructing the urban social context also by way of access to a culture that is increasingly open to disadvantaged groups.

Bologna cultural policies in the 1970s and 1980s

During these two decades, effective initiatives aimed at **decentralisation and increasing citizens' participation** in decision-making processes were carried out at a political level, which also had positive consequences at a social level.

Cultural policies were an important part of this time of participation and access. Initiatives aimed at **increasing citizen's cultural consumption** contributed towards the objective of **cultural democratisation**. This increase in cultural consumption was achieved by **improving the organisation of cultural institutions** and **by building polyvalent centres and neighbourhood libraries.**

The cultural initiatives of that period were also used by public authorities to enhance political consensus-building.

City marketing, the regeneration of cities and cultural planning strategies in Europe from 1990

From the end of the 1980s, urban cultural policies developed within a context characterised by the following elements:

1. the introduction of **city marketing** as an instrument for the valorisation of certain territorial areas, as a consequence of increased competitiveness between cities;
2. a prevalence of **economic development objectives**
3. **urban regeneration** policies that affected a growing number of European cities
4. a shift from traditional urban cultural policies towards **cultural planning strategies**

City marketing and the role of cultural planning in Europe

By city (territorial) marketing we mean, traditionally, the application of marketing instruments for the valorisation of a specific territorial area with the aim of improving settlement conditions and the appeal of a locality in the eyes of investors and current or potential users. The development of city marketing from 1990 to the present day is a consequence of the **increased competitiveness between cities** at local, national and international levels.

The **operative objectives**, diversified from one another yet integrated within a single planning project, are multiple.

From the **external point of view**: attracting new economic and productive activities by offering new public services, offering efficient public services and infrastructures, thus attracting new tourist flows; promoting a positive image.

The specific **internal objectives** to be attained are: satisfying the needs of the citizen and the productive activities of the territory to improve the quality of life while increasing the relationship of trust with local authorities and creating a profound sense of belonging to the territory.

This distinction between internal marketing and external marketing is relevant from the operative standpoint; from a conceptual perspective, however, it is important to underline integrations in order to be able to involve all stakeholders.

Since the mid-1980s, the idea has spread throughout Europe that assets and cultural resources, understood in a broad and an anthropological sense, perform a primary function in any definition of the **identity of a territory and the community** that refers to that territory.

A territory is not only the place where one lives, works and builds up social relations – it is also the place towards which feelings of belonging can be experienced through a process of identification, the place as a territory of one's choice of identity (Gelosi 2004). The territory and cities are, though, such complex systems that city marketing needs to innovate on the instruments of traditional intervention, taking into account those disciplines that are capable of analysing all different cultural dimensions. In this way, it is possible to identify the single, local, cultural resources that will constitute the starting point for any cultural planning project which must in any case be realised according to territorial and non-sectoral dimensions.

The regeneration of cities

From the end of the 1980s until the end of the 1990s, economic development objectives had prevailed along with the **city regeneration by means of investment policies, the use of marketing instruments and promotion of the image of cities**. Thus, the city manager was born.

The definition of culture in this phase is characterised in an anthropological sense; and it comprises not only artistic products but also costumes, traditions and ways of life that connote a whole population, or parts of it.

The **positive aspects** of the public policies of those years are essentially three in number (Bianchini 1993, 1999), namely:

a. The **reuse of buildings or decaying or abandoned neighbourhoods in their entirety**. The difficult economic situation that has affected many European cities has forced public administrations to rethink the use of these buildings or whole parts of the city in terms of new objectives. In many cases these objectives have been related to cultural development: the old manufacturing economy has been replaced by a more innovative cultural economy;

b. This change has brought about **the emergence of new companies and new professions oriented towards culture**. The number of workers created and the quantity of wealth produced have generally been insufficient to resolve local economic crises, yet the move has allowed for the more immediate difficulties to be overcome and has provided some indications as to possible future decisions;

c. These urban cultural policy decisions have allowed **different European cities to achieve an international city image, whose identity is characterised by the existence of a cultural renaissance**.

From traditional urban cultural policies to cultural planning strategies in Europe from the end of the 1990s

The phase that stretches from **the end of the 1990s until now** has at times been characterised by the presence of fully-fledged '**cultural planning strategies**', entities that have been a subject of debate since the early 1990s (McNulty 1991, 1996; Mercer 1991; Bianchini 1996, 1999; D'Angelo Vespérini 1998, 2000).

It is a phase wishing to overcome some of the limits of the urban cultural policies of the previous time period. Traditional cultural policies are to be differentiated in relation to assorted artistic sectors (from theatre to dance, from literature to folklore), and the cultural planning strategies locate the cultural standpoint in first place in any definition of development policies for the whole of a territory.

According to Colin Mercer, cultural planning is characterised by planning and the strategic and integrated use of cultural resources for urban and community development.

Planning is understood here as the organisational cornerstone that gives rise to all the other functions of public policy. From this choice, there follows a need for cooperation and integration between urban and architectural planning and planning undertaken by economists, with there being an increase in the number of social actors and the disciplines involved as a result. Among the actors involved, besides the public sector, we have the private and the third sector.

The **interdisciplinary nature** is thereby broadened to include sociological, anthropological, ethnographic and historical approaches.

The **strategic role** means that cultural planning is part of a broader strategy of development of the territory, with objectives that refer not only to the physical environment but also to economic, industrial, social and tourism-related development.

Being **integrated** means that the possibility of a strategic usage of cultural resources must be thought through and planned right from the idea-creating phase of the project.

Culture is no longer, therefore, merely one of the sectors of a territory's development – it is **the paradigm that orients territorial development**; even economists agree on the fact that culture is not solely a value - it is also an important economic resource (Zukin 1995; Amin Thrift 2004), and it is a resource that can perform a strategic role in the policy of city marketing because local cultural resources are non-material resources that offer an important competitive advantage; that is, they are not easily acquirable or imitable by competing territories.

Another key concept of cultural planning is, according to Franco Bianchini (2004:7), a broad definition of **'cultural resources'**, which consists of the following elements:

"- arts and media activities and institutions;
- youth culture, ethnic minority cultures and other 'communities of interest';
- heritage, including archaeology, gastronomy, local dialects and rituals;
- local and external images and perceptions of a city, including the ways in which they have changed in the course of history and how they can be 'interpreted' by different groups within the population - by, for example, children, particular ethnic communities, and the elderly;
- the natural and built environment, including public and open spaces;
- the diversity and quality of leisure, cultural, eating, drinking, and entertainment facilities and activities;
- local milieu and institutions for intellectual and scientific innovation, including universities and private sector research centres;
- the repertoire of local products and skills in crafts, manufacturing and services - including local food products, gastronomic and design traditions".

From a general perspective, going beyond the indications of Rod Fisher (2002) we can subdivide **European public policies for culture** according to seven prevalent orientations, ones that do not mutually exclude one another:

- defensive policies: promotion of initiatives that protect and safeguard the cultural specificities of a given territory;

- social integration policies: broadening the possibilities for access to cultural products to segments of the population that have so far been excluded, which also affects the type of cultural provision;
- policies that favour the central role of the creative professions and that aim to increase employment and the knowledge economy;
- image-making policies;
- policies for the reorganisation of financing systems related to culture in order to make cultural initiatives more efficient and less onerous:
- marketing repositioning policies by placing cultural resources at the heart of development.

Bologna's cultural policies from the year 1990

Bologna's cultural strategies in this period developed on the basis of **two guiding principles**:

a, cultural policy choices that confirmed the objective of **further increasing the territory's cultural resources**;

b, attempts to introduce **some elements of cultural planning** following the city's nomination as **European City of Culture in 2000** and **Unesco City of Music in 2006**.

In the early 1990s, Bologna's cultural policy objectives were carried forward via the development of its cultural resources, which are quite considerable for a city with a population of only 375,000.

Bologna's key cultural resources include:

- **The city's historic, artistic and cultural heritage and its being an important historic centre**. It has one of the best preserved historic city centres in Europe, having more than 40km of porticoes;
- **An integrated system of libraries and museums** and an important *cineteca* (film archive), which carries out vital film restoration work. During this time period, a process was begun to bring greater administrative and decisional autonomy to all of the city's cultural institutions.
- The **University of Bologna** (founded in 1088) **and multi-disciplinary research centres**. The University of Bologna offers all academic disciplines and has links with the most important universities in the world. Both the university laboratories and other public research centres in Bologna guarantee a high concentration of researchers and research projects in a large number of fields;

- The 60,000 university students attending study courses in Bologna[1] also contributes to the fact that **Bologna's cultural consumption is one of the highest in Italy**, even if the number of tourists visiting the city is relatively low. This increased access of parts of the population to cultural products, promoted by financing from public administration and cultural foundations, also represents an important **instrument for social integration**;
- **State-of-the-art communications technology in the public and private sectors**. In 1996, the Municipality of Bologna promoted the first city network in Italy and the number of industrial patents is among the highest in Italy;
- **Expressions of material culture**, such as artisans' products, industrial design, food and local traditions. The nutritional culture of Bologna represents a unique form of living culture due to its complex and traditional ways of food preparation; it serves to highlight modern attitudes towards biodiversity as a nutritional factor within good health and prevention against illness;
- A **large number of non-profit organisations** operating both in the social and cultural fields;
- **Innovative industrial districts**, made up of small businesses. Many of these companies work in the knowledge and culture sectors.

As Charles Landry (2008: 132) wrote: "Of relevance here are highly networked, non-hierarchical innovative regions, such as Silicon Valley and the so-called third Italy around Emilia Romagna,[2] in which individual firms, often quite small, flourish in a milieu of constant technical improvement and the presence of specialised support services".

Today, however, these services are becoming more refined, in that "the notion of necessary support services has broadened from the presence of venture capitalists or distribution chains to embrace the need for cultural facilities, urban buzz often created by cultural industry entrepreneurs or arts types, social activities and more general amenities linked to quality of life, including good housing, transport and health facilities. Urban milieux need to provide networking opportunities in non-working settings or between firms. This might include the capacity for a chance meeting in a café, a concert, a health club or school. What is important is discovering which types of urban environment encourage such interaction"? (Landry 2008: 132).

Bologna : European City of Culture in the year 2000

Bologna was nominated ***European City of Culture* in 2000** (Grandi 2001, Galvani 2001).

The European City of Culture is a city designated by the European Union for a period of one calendar year, during which it is given a chance to showcase its cultural life and cultural development. Since its beginnings in 1985, with the selection of Athens, a number of European cities have taken advantage of the City of Culture year to transform their cultural base and, in doing so, the way in which they are viewed internationally. In 2000, the decision was made to select not one, but nine cities.

Bologna's main objectives coincided with the cultural policies of European cities of that period, even if the city set its sights on a new horizon, one that foresaw the adoption of more suitable and proper cultural planning strategies:

a, **to assert the right to culture** both as broadened access to cultural consumption and as a chance to produce culture throughout the territory;

b, to consider **culture from an anthropological standpoint**; also favouring expressions of culture coming from young people and different "communities of interest";

c, to position **culture as one of the main resources for developing the territory** both from economic and urban planning perspectives;

d, this choice foresees, firstly, the **international repositioning of the city of Bologna as a centre of intense activity in terms of cultural production and consumption** and, secondly, the beginning of **a journey aimed at fostering the development of both cultural and knowledge professions**.

e, **new, very important cultural infrastructures**, understood as new public spaces

f, **Bologna's inclusion in the network of cities of art and culture**, from which it was previously excluded;

g, **to give the city's cultural institutions, organisations and associations a chance to create cultural products that will allow them to grow (also from an entrepreneurial standpoint)**.

In order to achieve these objectives, work has been carried out on two levels:

A, **Creating large cultural infrastructures, capable not only of increasing cultural growth but also fostering the production of cultural initiatives promoted by institutions and organisations within the local territory.** These infrastructures include: the largest Italian library (designed as an important public space); the restoration of a large exhibition and congress centre; a museum dedicated to music; university laboratories dedicated to music, theatre and audiovisual media; the new modern art museum. The aim was to: a) emphasise the important cultural role of the city's historic centre, where most of these new infrastructures are located; b) regenerate parts of the historic centre which were abandoned or derelict.

One of the most interesting outcomes was **the re-conversion of a large decaying area of the city** which was previously home to a tobacco manufacturer, the city slaughterhouse and an ice factory. This new area **- called *Manifattura delle Arti*** – was designed with culture at the heart of its development.

This area is now home to municipal institutions and university institutions that carry out joint cultural projects and benefit from having a geographical proximity[3];

B) **Planning important cultural events**, organised not only by the large cultural institutions within the local territory, but also by smaller cultural associations. In this way, the smaller associations had an opportunity to be a part of productions that were bigger than anything they had organised beforehand. The events dealt with all kinds of disciplines and their production led to the development of a large number of small, innovative cultural industries related to music, theatre, video, multimedia, cartoon creation, computer technology, arts and festivals.

Bologna: Unesco City of Music, 2006

Bologna was the first city in Italy and second in Europe (after Seville) to be nominated as a Unesco Creative City of Music. The city boasts a vibrant musical tradition, which is constantly evolving; and there is here a serious commitment to promoting music as a means of economic development and social and cultural inclusion.

Bologna's musical tradition is one of the most important in Europe; today, the city has an extremely prestigious musical offering owing to there being the presence of a number of important production companies (from the Fondazione Teatro Comunale to the Fondazione Musica Insieme, Bologna Festival, Angelica and the Mozart Orchestra directed by Claudio Abbado) as well as important **further education institutions** (the University, the Music Conservatory and the Philharmonic Academy) and music schools.

The city also boasts **320 associations and local cultural centres** that organise music-related activities. Some of these offer an informal approach to music education, one aimed at non-specialists; others provide both international and local groups with space and opportunities to perform. In 2007, there were more than 2.1 million spectators at musical events (AA. VV. 2008).

This diffusion of musical culture spreads across all genres of music and has led to the growth of **a local music industry that also specialises in provision of performance-related services and recording studios**.

Bologna is also a member of Unesco's International Coalition of Cities against Racism. Music is used as a means of communication to bring together people of different ages, traditions and cultures – and **music is considered to be one of the elements within the re-invention of public open spaces**, too.

Cultural planning and the creative city in the 2000s

Application of the concept of creativity to cultural planning, city marketing and urban development can be seen as the most advanced phase of city development planning.

First, there is **cultural valorisation** as a strategic resource for the local territory; second, there is a **creativity** which gradually develops **from being a particular feature of cultural production so that it becomes a feature of the urban development process as a whole**.

Creativity

There are **many definitions of creativity**[4], referring to different disciplinary fields. For the purposes of our study here, we will highlight two of these: **the alternative to instrumental thinking** and **a capacity for problem-solving**.

Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, in their book *The Creative City* (1985: 18), see creativity as **an alternative to instrumental thinking**: "genuine creativity involves thinking a problem afresh and from first principles; experimentation; originality; the capacity to rewrite rules; to be unconventional; to discover common threads amid the seemingly disparate; to look at situation latterly and with flexibility".

According to Newell, Shaw and Simon (1985: 4), creativity coincides with problem-solving when: "1. the product of the thinking has novelty and value (either for the thinker or for his culture); 2. the thinking is unconventional, in the sense that it requires modification or rejection of previously-accepted ideas; 3.

the thinking requires high motivation and persistence, either taking place over a considerable span of time (continuously or intermittently) or occurring at high intensity; 4. the problem as initially posed was vague and ill-defined, so that part of the task was to formulate the problem itself".

Creative cities

The term 'creative cities' first came into use in the mid-1980s, yet it wasn't until the end of the 1990s that it began to be applied in the context of urban development. Such a characterisation of cities is a consequence of both globalisation and of the demands of the knowledge economy, i.e. which focus on processes of innovation and a diffusion of knowledge, skills and creativity.

It is not easy to define the features that make a city a 'creative city', but by referring to the large number of research projects carried out **it is possible to identify preconditions for creative cities** in relation to, firstly, the **valorisation of capital** and, secondly, **valorisation of the creative milieu fabric**.

The valorisation of capital as a precondition for the development of creative cities

The main areas of capital valorisation, as a precondition for the development of creative cities, can be defined by referring to two main sources[5]:

A) **Intellectual and social capital**: being able to compete in the international knowledge economy means ensuring that the appropriate people, skills and capabilities are developed. Landry (2006: 288) highlights another two features: intellectual capital comprises "the ideas and innovative potential of a community"; and social capital represents "the complex web of relationships between organizations, communities and interest groups which make up civil society".

B) **Democratic capital:** city administrations need to be accountable to and transparent in their dealings and dialogue with citizens. City administrations must also provide for forms of citizen participation in decision-making processes in order to achieve the "democratisation of representative democracy" which many scholars desire.

C) **Culture and leisure capital**: a strong city 'brand' makes available a visibility that can propel the city into forms of competition for its residents, for business relocations, tourism and international events; culture is seen as not only a possibility of cultural fruition – it is additionally for the development of cultural industries that foster creative professions.

D) **Environmental capital:** cities consume significant resources and have to provide a clean, green and safe environment.

E) **Technical capital:** technology must be able to support the changing needs of citizens. This includes basic needs like transport, housing, water and energy as well as new demands for effective communications like those related to broadband and electronic networks.

F) **Financial capital**: growing demand for services and diminishing revenues needs creative and flexible financial strategies, ones that are often in partnership with the private sector.

G) **Creativity capital**: “the capacity to stand back, to connect the seemingly disconnected, to relax into ambiguity, to be original and inventive” (Landry 2006: 288).

The creative milieu as a precondition of creative cities

“A creative milieu is a place – either a cluster of buildings, a part of a city, a city as a whole or a region – that contains the necessary preconditions in terms of a ‘hard’ and ‘soft‘ infrastructure to generate a flow of ideas and inventions. Such a milieu is a physical setting where a critical mass of entrepreneurs, intellectuals, social activists, artists, administrators, power brokers or students can operate in an open-minded, cosmopolitan context and where face-to-face interaction creates new ideas, artefacts, products, services and institutions and as a consequence contributes to economic success.” (Laundry 2008:)

The elements that characterise a creative milieu, according to various scholars (among others: Aydalot 1986; Florida 2002, 2005; Hall 1988; Landry 2006, 2008; Santagata 2009; Toernqvist 1983) include:

1. “**Proximity and access to a range of knowledge, ideas and highly qualified professional skills**. All of this appears closely linked to the presence of elements such as the university, research centres and advanced services,” (Santagata et al. 2009: 65).
2. An **innovative entrepreneurial fabric** and “a sound **financial basis**, adequate to allow room for experimentation without tight regulation” (Landry 2008: 140) as a precondition for the constant emergence of new businesses.
3. The presence of a Creative Class, whose indicators (according to Richard Florida 2002: 8) include: **talent, technology and tolerance**. To this end, Richard Florida (2002: 8) declares, firstly, “the **core** of the Creative Class is to include

people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content. Around the core, the Creative Class also includes a **broader group of creative professionals in business and finance, law, health care and related fields".** As we have already mentioned, "These people engage in complex problem solving that involves a great deal of independent judgement and requires high levels of education or human capital. In addition, all members of the Creative Class – whether they are artists or engineers, musicians or computer scientists, writers or entrepreneurs – **share a common creative ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference and merit**. For the members of the Creative Class, every aspect and every manifestation of creativity – technological, cultural and economic – is interlinked and inseparable." (Florida 2002: 8)

5. Efficient processes of **knowledge diffusion** and a **concentration of highly qualified skills** (Andersson et al. 2009) also in relation to the workforce as a whole.
6. "**Evolved consumption** linked to creative, recreative and cultural activities. This kind of consumption is linked to a growing tendency for people to spend more on this type of activity" (Santagata et al. 2009: 69). Cities with these characteristics are better equipped to attract the "Creative Class" who will then see these cities not only as pleasant places to live but also as an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with people who are similar to themselves. Such exchanges constitute the raw material for creativity. This theory is presented in a convincing way by Elizabeth Currid (2007) in relation to New York City[6], but it can be applied, in varying proportions, to all cities that have a high "Creative Class" density.
7. "A **multidisciplinary and dynamically synergistic environment** which especially links developments in science and the arts" (Landry 2008: 140)
8. **Structural instability**, for creative cities are unstable and uncomfortable places where, according to Hall (1988), routines are constantly being threatened by the creative classes.
9. **Variety and cohabitation of different cultures and lifestyles** that favour tolerant social contexts, also thanks to the presence of informal and spontaneous communication processes (Ghilardi 2001).
10. **Cultural open-mindedness towards people and ideas** because "external influences, above all, drive existing contexts to compete and regenerate themselves constantly, thus preventing a crystallisation of customs and habits that, over time, become obsolete and stifle creativity"(Santaga et al. 2009: 73)
11. A **transparent and non-bureaucratic public administration** that facilitates the emergence of creative industries.

Risks for creative cities

Various authors (among others: Zukin 1995; Bianchini Ghilardi 1997; Landry 2006; Ghilardi 2008, Santagata et al. 2009) have dealt with the subject of potential risks linked to the development of creative cities.

In their research on neighbourhood cultural activity in eleven cities, Bianchini and Ghilardi (1997) highlighted the risks inherent in using culture and creativity in setting in motion a process of **gentrification**[7]. According to Lia Ghilardi (2008: 3) "the creation of cultural quarters tended to produce a highly conflicting social mix with a split between affluent individuals living in the regenerated parts of town and low-income citizens living in run-down inner city areas". A part of the creative class consists of newcomers (often artists and students, in any case young people without much capital) who are the first to arrive in the city centre. They stay, Bohemian-style, in decaying houses in need of restoration, and contribute to increasing the number of establishments where creative people meet, thus adding value to the area. At this point, with the process of restoration or renovation, which raises property prices, there is **a risk that the very same creative people who first came to the centre and who are important players in the urban creative processes**[8] **will be driven out of the city centre**. It is true that urban renovation processes often use this mechanism of real estate valorisation. The first wave of creative people, pushed out of the city centre, go to "colonise" another part of the city. When the critical mass grows to an adequate size, this part of the city is then considered a place of high creative density and therefore an ideal candidate for new renovation work, which will raise real estate property prices and drive out the first wave of inhabitants once again. It is clear that this process cannot go on indefinitely and that it threatens to set in motion mechanisms of real estate speculation which, over time, lead to a situation where demand and supply can no longer meet.

Another risk associated with **the expulsion of marginalised groups in the direction of old inner city areas and peripheral housing estates** – **which often do not figure on the map of urban regeneration** – is that such a concentration will increase the already strong sense of separation and cultural alienation within these social groups (Bianchini Ghilardi 1997; Ghilardi 2008).

It is not unusual to find that these processes of requalification and price increases tend to "favour those processes of gentrification that often end in the levelling out of the social fabric (and often the aesthetic and architectural profile as well) of many city neighbourhoods, diminishing their authenticity and innovative drive." (Santagata et al.: 74). In these gentrified areas the urban cultural values are often replaced by others of a more commercial bent and **lifestyle takes the place of civic commitment** (Zukin 1995). In these cases, as many researchers claim, "shopping malls and night-time entertainment venues replace traditional galleries, museums and civic centres, resulting in a 'banalisation', or 'theming', of urban experiences, thus undermining the distinctive creative potential of a place" (Ghilardi 2008: 3).

When the vision of the city as a whole becomes usurped by choices made on the basis of "short-term solutions, quick, mainly cosmetic, forms of regeneration and marketisation of local images and identities, the problem is that strategies based only on consumption tend not to support local cultural production, and thus neglect the potential for innovation and distinctiveness. The problem is that the market for personal experiences is highly volatile and sensitive to shifts in taste and fashion, and newly themed attractions often lack subtlety" (Ghilardi 2008: 4).

In this way, we can talk about the risk of reinforcing a sort of **creative divide** that separates the creative elite on one side and, on the other, the social groups that are excluded from various aspects of the creative economy; and this separation has two potentially dangerous consequences: the first relates to **the "drying up" of the basic mechanism of creative development**, when the first wave of creative people have been driven out; while the second relates to **the social tensions that can arise as a result of ghettoisation in peripheral urban areas**, that is, of social groups who do not even come close to enjoying the benefits of the creative economy.

Bologna from Cultural City to Creative City?

A fundamental aspect of European creative cities is the ties they have to the local territory – and this is particularly true for medium- and small-sized cultural capitals, such as Bologna.

Bologna's preconditions for becoming a creative city

The following is **a list of the cultural resources** and other features that are potentially useful for Bologna's transformation from cultural city to creative city.

With regard to indicators that connote the "**cultural rate**" of an area in competitive terms, Bologna ranks among the first in Italy. This high position might be attributed to:

- a wide **diffusion of knowledge, learning and a concentration of highly qualified skills**, also due to the presence of the **University of Bologna** and **research centres and innovation** that are widespread throughout both the public and private sectors;

- a large number **of active cultural associations**;
- a notable number of **businesses working in the knowledge and culture sectors**, especially in the production of cultural industry elements that provide both goods and services with a highly symbolic content, along with both information and communication;
- the high quality and wealth of **skills within the production industry related to audiovisual, cinema and digital** (AA.VV. 2007)**, music, the performing arts, entertainment and cultural services;**
- the wealth of **cultural opportunities** that places Bologna among the top Italian cities and leads to **high levels of evolved consumption** related to recreational and cultural activities;
- this high level of cultural consumption also denotes a **good level of social quality**, as human relationships and social cohesion are improved.

Bologna also shares with other Italian cities some features that can be considered prerequisites for the development of a creative city (Santagata et al. 2009: 75-76), namely:

- an **extensive and well-preserved historic centre**, which favours a strong and recognisable urban identity; this is also thanks to the presence of its important university, which was founded in 1088;
- a **very important artistic and architectural heritage**, one which is able to attract people from outside;
- a **good quality of life**, confirmed by the Shanghai Expo Committee's decision to include Bologna in the *Urban Best Practices Area* (UBPA) in the "liveable cities" sector.
- a major number of small businesses and successful ***cultural districts***.

Preconditions for creative cities that are lacking or insufficient in Bologna

Bologna is certainly an important cultural city and possesses many of the features that constitute preconditions for its development into a creative city. Having listed the features that Bologna possesses, we will now look at those **features** which are either **insufficient or totally lacking**:

a) **entrepreneurship is not as innovative as it should be**;
b) the **industrial fabric of small businesses and districts** struggles to compete with the challenges of globalisation and economic recession;
c) the **financial base** via which to undertake experimentation is not sufficient;

d) **Italian regulations** are too restrictive both for the public and private sectors, and they very often slow down the implementation of projects dealing with urban planning innovation;
e) in consequence of the above, **a creative class is present in the city, but is unable to reach its full potential**; above all, there are not enough mechanisms for attracting new talent;
f) the **social context** is sufficiently integrated, even if the social composition **is not sufficient in its being both ethnically and culturally diversified** to make Bologna wide open to external influences

For Bologna to be a creative city

In order for Bologna to complete its transformation from cultural city to creative city, it is necessary to[9]:

A) **Maintain the historic centre as a vibrant space for culture and higher education; at the same time there is a need to develop a process of polycentric development in order to identify spaces that can be dedicated to important and innovative cultural and creative activities within the urban context, though these may be outside the historic centre and in areas in need of renovation.** This process is already underway with the relocation of several university faculties to areas outside the historic centre, the opening of a Technology Park and the planning of a transport system to connect such new creative centres. So as to become **an instrument for social inclusion** these initiatives must be carried out in an integrated manner to avoid two possible risks: first, gentrification of the historic centre – which would as a result lose its strong historic and cultural identity as well as its 'liveability'; while there is the risk that it may be transformed into a shopping centre similar to those in cities with no historic heritage; and, second, the ghettoisation of new urban areas outside the city centre, should these areas not be equipped with services, infrastructure, public spaces or an efficient transport system;
B) **Favour mechanisms for attracting those skills, knowledge and talents that constitute the creative class, not only through urban planning innovation but also through financial and other kinds of benefit.** These measures will have to take into account two important situations in the context of Bologna. The presence of widespread and highly-developed small businesses working in the knowledge and culture sectors, who can use these mechanisms to try to upgrade their businesses and perhaps compete in more advanced

creative markets. Regarding the presence of an important university, first of all the conditions must be created in order to keep the best talents from the University of Bologna – persons who have also gained important international experience – in the city;

C) **Make Bologna more open to external influences by means of specific initiatives that use multi-culturality and diversity as strategic tools for growth and sustainable cultural, social and economic development.** Where initiatives with this aim are lacking – especially in times of economic crisis – multi-culturality and diversity will be seen as dangerous elements that one needs to defend oneself against through social, cultural and political closure towards "the other";

D) **Increase citizens' participation in the process of redefining Bologna's identity through informative and inclusive initiatives using both the network and meetings across the territory.** It is necessary to work together with citizens to carry forward a decision-making process so as to develop Bologna as a creative city. The aim here is to achieve **a balance between development of new forms of creativity suited to today's knowledge economy and existing characteristics of liveability and social cohesion** that are from the place's heritage and which have yet to be valorised further. This concept of the city must then be portrayed through "stories" that will be able to increase citizens' identification with the city and enhance its ability to be internationally recognised by others;

E) **Creativity, which constitutes a fundamental aspect of artistic production[10], must be gradually extended from the cultural industry to other areas of the territory's social, political and economic life.** According to Franco Bianchini and Lia Ghilardi (Bianchini 1993; Ghilardi 2001, 2008), cultural planning is not merely the planning of culture but **a cultural approach to urban planning and policy**. Today, in the various fields of human activity –from the economic to the social sphere, from culture to politics, from urban planning to training – new problems constantly emerge that cannot be dealt with merely by following routine procedures or conventions. For this reason, creativity (with its dual meaning as an alternative to instrumental thinking and as problem-solving) must be adopted by those in charge of the decision-making processes involved in defining Bologna's sustainable development.

F) This widespread creativity takes the form of a **civic creativity**, which is to be interpreted as: **"imaginative problem-solving applied to objectives for the public good. It involves the public sector being more entrepreneurial, though within the bounds of accountability, and the private sector being**

more aware of its responsibilities to the collective whole." (Landry 2006: 2). This new way of facing the challenges of 21st century cities can only be implemented if it is a common objective shared by both citizens and public/private institutions and organisations.

If the city **"sets up a system"**, if everyone relinquishes just a little of their individual, associative or corporate selfishness and regains a sense of community, only then will **'Bologna Creative City'** become more than just a slogan; and only then can it become **a development plan** and, at the same time, have **a strong and identifying character within and outside the city**. XXX OK? OK

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Notes

1 Another 20,000 students attend courses organised by the University of Bologna but which are held outside the city, in four other cities in the region: Forlì, Cesena, Ravenna, Rimini.
2 Bologna is the capital city of the Emilia-Romagna Region.
3 These cultural institutions include: the Department of Communication Sciences, Music laboratories, Theatre, the Cinema of the Faculty of Letters, the Modern Art Museum and the Cineteca (both of them belong to the City Council), together with two public cinemas and a research library dedicated to cinema.
4 The Encyclopedia Britannica gives the following definition for creativity: "Ability to produce something new through imaginative skill, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form. The term generally refers to a richness of ideas and originality of thinking".
5 The main research projects are: the study carried out by Pricewaterhouse **Coopers on** *Cities of the future: Global competition, local leadership*, aimed at identifying the most important areas for the challenge of creating future strategies; and Charles Landry's *The art of City Making*, which summarises twenty years of the author's observations and aims to define a vision of the art of city-making for cities in the 21st century.
6 It is no coincidence that she writes that her book is a "story about how New York City makes creativity and, just important, how creativity makes New York City" (Currid 2007: 15)
7 The gentrification phenomenon involves the renovation of redundant industrial buildings located in city centres through real estate deals that essentially modify their social context: residents with low incomes are replaced by middle-class citizens with higher incomes, who are the only ones who can

afford the high rents. Sometimes the buildings that are demolished also have a cultural value and identity within the territory.

8 “The main challenge in the years ahead is to achieve an expansion in the middle and upper segments while remaining accessible to starters without much capital. The creative class consists, after all, of newcomers without much capital and of those who have had their career and have a more generous budget at their disposal.” (Bontje and Mustered 2005: 6)

9 We have also taken into account the work groups on Culture, Knowledge and Creativity coordinated by Roberto Calari (Calari 2009).

10 According to Joe Berridge (2006:20), the principles of artistic creativity are: “Flexibility: the ability to see things differently and act accordingly. Innovation: the ability to apply an original solution to a long-standing problem. Risk-taking: the ability to accept the consequences of failure. Leadership: the ability of one person to set a direction for the whole.”

Leda Guidi

PARTICIPATION THROUGH NEW MEDIA IN THE BOLOGNA MUNICIPALITY

"The web is more social than a technological invention"
Tim Berners-Lee,
World Wide Web inventor and WC3 director

Bologna Profile, Ict and Dialogue with Citizens

Bologna is the seventh largest city in Italy as far as the number of inhabitants is concerned (almost 400,000), and it is sixth as regards economic importance. The metropolitan area of Bologna (more than 900,000 inhabitants) ranks second, after Milan. Important features of Bologna are its high level of economic development and extensive pre-school, educational, social, cultural and sports services. The Municipality of Bologna has since the early '90s focused its government policies and plans on having a concrete commitment to the use of new networking technologies for the delivery of information and services to the community and the development of eCitizenship. The Iperbole Civic Network (www.comune.bologna.it), first in Italy and second in Europe (after Amsterdam), was born in 1995. Iperbole is a kind of "holistic platform" for information, e-services, interaction and exchanges with and among end-users; it is also conceived as a participative website, shared by public interest and non-profit bodies of the metropolitan area alike, and as an ongoing 'laboratory' to promote the knowledge society at a local level. Having policies of making web services multichannel and ubiquitous, in 2006 the Bologna Municipality also started the "Iperbole Wireless" project, with the aim of using the Wi-Fi infrastructure and providing free broadband access and innovative content for the community. "Iperbole Wireless" covers – within the framework of different partnerships and the collaboration of the University concerning content for the dedicated "on air" portal – a city centre-wide area including the City Hall, the main square of the city, some roads in the historic center near the University, the city's most important municipal libraries, the culture/arts district, the Municipality's new premises and some other places inside and outside the city center. Yet information and communication with citizens are the 'pillars' of the Municipality's strategy – there is an open and concrete approach to empowering the community, making citizens aware of rights (and duties) while promoting inclusion and participation.

The City Administration is now developing a poli-centric system of communication, giving a special commitment to listening to the needs and expectations of citizens/users and creating various ways/channels of providing feedback. Data assessing the impact of this communication strategy in social and economical contexts helps in the building of a reliable model for interactions and a multichannel delivery of services. In this evolving and ongoing framework citizens are able to play a major role both as users and as interlocutors, providing ideas and making useful contributions in the design and implementation of services that increasingly focus on the needs and wishes/expectations of the community. In the last 17 years there has been constant commitment by the Municipality of Bologna to promote:

- **the use of networking technologies**
- **digital convergence and multimedia opportunities**
- **interactive communication**
- **citizens' participation in decision-making processes**

via the free Iperbole civic network and e-community (more than 27000 users in October 2011) and the Internet portal (more than 66.000 pages). Why might one have a civic network as a suitable platform for a local digital agenda? Civic networks and portals are related to two different communication models, ones designed for different purposes. The portal was in its initial "concept" a tool for commercial communications and marketing, based on a model that was mostly uni-directional and with contents organized in a taxonomic and hierarchical way, i.e. from the general to the specific. It was expected to evolve according to the logistics of the distribution of products and services (the paradigm for which has become mainstream in Public administration websites too – nowadays, governments "think" mostly in a "portal format"). Civic networks are spaces, that is, "genetically" social, horizontal, poli-centric, multi-directional and communication models that have been developed in public and open contexts, principally based on exchange, sharing and co-operation.

The American civic and free networks of the '80s (a different Internet era, even before the web 1.0!) were grassroots communications and interaction platforms, and were built on the basis of associative and voluntary relationships and within different contexts of civic and social need and interests; the openness/inclusion "philosophy" was born in this kind of cultural environment.

Portals, Civic Networks – A Hybrid of the Two Models in the Web 1.0 World

"Classical" institutional portals usually publish content and services that are solely provided by the Administration of the time. Civic network portals, however, come into the community in different ways: according to context and approach, and enriched by information and services provided by many other stakeholders, such as:

- other types of public administration in the same territory
- cultural associations and voluntary organisations
- citizens and consumer associations
- non-profit bodies
- communities and cultural expressions of them
- **schools**
- **foundations**
- **interest groups**

From 1995 to 2011 the main goals of the Iperbole civic network has been:

- **Building Digital Information and Knowledge Society at a local level**
- **The hosting of e-resources by non-profit bodies**
- **Consolidating a dialogue between citizens and the Municipality with a multi-channel approach (not only via the web)**
- **e-literacy and e-inclusion initiatives in partnership with non-profit and private bodies having similar aims**
- **Promoting an open "public sphere" to develop innovation, social capital, creativity and e-governance**
- **Pursuing improvements in social cohesion, local development and equal opportunities in relation to the ICT**
- **A Lab for collective intelligence/to act a repository**

Iperbole in the 2.0 World and the Ubiquitous Internet

My Iperbole www.comune.bologna.it/lamiaiperbole

This is an experimental platform based on the use of 2.0 tools. It is possible for users to combine content published on the web in different ways and to make a summation of feeds from other sites. The main features of this communication model are oriented towards:

- Interactivity
- Customization
- Flexibility
- **Modularity**
- **Being an Open Source**
- **'Mash up'**

Iperbole Wireless

From 2006, the Municipality of Bologna decided to give free access to all subscribed users (Iperbole users, students, teachers and Bologna University staff; and from 2011 also to tourists and city visitors – thus more than 12.000 users in October 2011).

The infrastructure takes in a wide area of the city centre and other areas on the outskirts selected as "relevant" as regards Municipality digital inclusion policies and civic purposes. The Iperbole Wireless strategy should progressively "light up" the wireless city network while utilising opportunities provided by different contexts and ongoing opportunities to bring on board private partnerships and sponsors.

The Wireless civic network is a new way to extend the online community, promote policies regarding broadband access; it makes access to Internet outdoors and while "in motion" easier; and it will expand electronic citizenship and chances for persons to play a part in issues of concern to the whole city (thus keeping on the path of the mission set in motion by the "traditional" Iperbole Civic Network).

We are now having to cope with the phenomenon of **convergence of the new Information and Communication Technologies, brought about by the multichannel communications approach,** i.e. the possibility of communicating with citizens whilst letting them participate at any time and anywhere using different channels aimed at different targets, in whatever day-life situations there may be.

Our portfolio of digital channels now in place are:

- **DTT:** digital terrestrial television (www.lepida.tv)
- **Call Center** (unique number 051 203040): probably the easiest "terminal" via which to get friendly information, support and specific consultations. More than 110.000 in 2010.
- **Newsletters** both for city information/events and organised by the district.
- **Iperbole newsletter:** More than 5.000 readers.
- **District newsletters:** more than 2.000 readers (in October 2011)
- **Informative screens** promoting Municipal services and activities
- **SOCIAL PLATFORMS FOR EXCHANGE AND SHARING,** e.g.
  - YouTube - more than 40 uploaded videos www.youtube.com/ComuneDiBologna,
  - Facebook - more than 4.900 fans - www.facebook.com/comunedibologna -
  - Twitter - more than 1300 followers - http://twitter.com/Twiperbole

As we are committed to **traditional face-to-face communication,** too, our main, 'physical' (with an online website) front offices are:

- Central Front Office (URP - Office for the Relationships with Citizens). 244.046 visits / 5.711 emails received in 2010.
- City Districts' Front Offices (15). 280.082 phone contacts in 2010.
- Iperbole Front Office - Civic network services. 18.697 users of the Internet public places in 2010.
- Europe Direct information point. 4.712 contacts (visits + phone + email) in 2010.
- Sportello Sociale di Quartiere - District Welfare Front Office. 20.992 total contacts in 2010.
- Sportello Imprese - Front Office for Enterprises. 11.099 visits / 692 online contacts in 2010.
- Sportello Lavoro - "Job and Employment" Front Office. 5.169 visits in 2010.
- Sportello Edilizia - Front Office for Building Activities. 38.900 visits / 4.994 online contacts / 16.000 phone contacts in 2010.
- Urban center - Planning and Development of the City/Territory

CzRM – Citizen Relationship Management – Punto d'ascolto – Point of listening

This is a distinctive platform created for the "intelligent management" of relationships with citizens and the horizontal integration of information related to the community. The system keeps track of all contacts and of the whole "history" of problem-solving processes. The online notification service allows persons to send suggestions, make complaints and any other kind of contact. Maps are embedded, too from any Municipality front office, by using a phone, smart phone, email, online form, 'traditional' letter etc.

The Office for Relations with Citizens directly answers or forwards messages to the right office/district within the same digital environment; suggestions/complaints/requests/comments received in year 2010 by the Municipality offices numbered 2051 via email and 1130 via the web.

Online suggestions/complaints/comments will start being processed by Municipality staff within 1 (immediate answer) to 3 days. An answer's components might be handled within a day (an immediate answer) to a maximum of 3 months depending on issue complexity and the number of offices/other public bodies involved in the process. The average time is 30 days.

Some Participative Processes Related to the Iperbole Civic Network

In recent years, the Municipality has activated some e-democracy processes involving citizens and communities in the city. The main ones were:

- Consultation of citizens, districts, civil society, professionals, bodies and associations about the new master plan for the city.
- Extension of the e-participation process to several district laboratories
- Consultation of citizens, districts, civil society bodies and associations in relation to the plan for mobile and wireless aerial station locations in the area of the city
- Consultation of citizens, civil society bodies and associations concerning a plan reviewing the municipal regulations system in support of civil society bodies (review of the rules for public third sector backing)
- Public Preliminary Investigation into immigration policies
- Public Preliminary Investigation into handicaps
- A POWER project and the WikiPower platform

Communication within the Administration as a Strategic Tool for Effective Internal/External Interaction

The Internal web portal – **IONOI, meaning I, US** – allows each member of the Municipal staff to access common information, services and applications; there are 3500 PC desks at the disposal of 3600 employees. Services enabling employees to request holidays online, to ask for other kinds of permit/authorization etc. are available. Technical, professional and social platforms have been developed to help increase internal communications and the horizontal circulation of information.

Also, public arenas (along with internal chatting) exist where skills and knowledge had by the organization and community can be shared.

TOWARDS Hiba! A hiperhivatkozás érvénytelen.

We are currently working to make mobile and web portal content and services available anywhere, e.g.:

- an Iphone and ipad-optimized version of the website -www.comune.bologna.it/wireless
- info. on the Iperbole Wireless network HotSpots
- an Iphone and ipad optimized version of the web site:
- www.comune.bologna.it/ situazione-viabilita
- a detailed description of road works occurring in the city
- as well as events, news...

The Near Future: Communication and Participation Strategy

The strategy here is based on:

- a multi-channel and multi-media approach
- providing citizens with an opportunity to support decision-making processes at any time and anywhere using different channels depending on different targets and contexts
- proximity level and EU context
- mediation/moderation
- availability of all documents and information related to discussed topics
- clear, transparent and agreed ‘rules of the game’ for procedures
- the involvement of ‘social actors’
- new communication and production models for ICT applications in collaboration with women’s associations (language, models and gender issues)
- policies and action regarding e-citizenship and e-inclusion (new citizens and migrants communities, too)
- free and attended access points for disabled people
- wireless access and connections for free (Iperbole Wireless)
- open source and open content/formats/data

Bologna As A Smart and Sustainable City

To attain this goal, which will be in line with European principles too, using a multi-stakeholder and participative methodology we will name the Bologna Digital Agenda along with Iperbole 2020, ‘Tomorrow’s Civic Network’. This will be a social and community-based “creative organism” making crowd-sourcing and user-generated content a backbone in the setting up of new Administration public policies and actions platform via:

- **Open government**
- **Transparency**
- **Openness of data**
- **‘Civic commons’**

Such are the main levers concerning innovation and shared/agreed governance of the city and its communities.

Different E-divides and the Bologna E-Inclusion/ Empowerment Perspective

Despite efforts made to fight digital barriers, some of the Bologna population risks being cut off from e-participation processes (in connection with, for example, age, gender, social-economic situation, etc.). Thus it is crucial to reach and involve the whole of the citizenry with more targeted telematic literacy and empowerment activities, taken in a broad sense. Weak points needing to be tackled are:

- More involvement in e-Participation on the political side
- Commitment by administrators at every level of government, offices and related facilities is also crucial
- Sustainability models for e-governance and e-democracy services
- New skills and profiles within the administration are needed
- More effort should be made to simplify language and specific and professional ’jargon’.

Pina Lalli

WHEN COMMUNICATION GOES WITH INCLUSION
A case analysis on participatory experiences in the municipality of Bologna

...a spectacle like this cannot find a justification within itself but must be oriented towards springing into world action".
[L. Boltanski 1993]

What we say and why? Which issues we approach and which ones not?
[F. Bouchayer 1984]

Foreword

Communication concerns information, words, picture, yet it may also include an *action and interaction* perspective, especially when we initiate advocacy campaigns in order to facilitate participatory alliances and community awareness of a social problem, even if this is the object of some controversy. Communication is a process of legitimate framing in existing public issues – then, public communicators can listen and offer new interpretations of stereotypes and prejudices. Social communication can give *voice and visibility* to the actions of marginal social actors – for it is not right that other persons should be telling the viewer about these others.

We are dealing here with a communication project brought to fruition by an Italian municipality with the active collaboration of many other local institutions and associations within the framework of a European plan against social exclusion[1]. It is small as to size and budget, but at the same time it is complex since it is only one step, yet one offering developments concerning the conceptual, social and cultural framework on which initiatives are based. It also involves research and training strategies acquired by the University's Master's Degree course in Public Communication, which, in our case, ensures that the strategies and messages are developed in a creative and participatory way so that all partners and stakeholders can be involved in project planning and implementation together with a small group of experts and university students. Our case analysis focuses on assessment of the entire communication process to reveal its added value and the social capital available at the end of the carried out activities, which, we can say, pave the way for new opportunities. So we shall here try to give an account of how we worked and on which framework the implementation was based. The main methodological framework refers to an interpretation and qualitative description of what has been done and how, taking into account the entire process of building and rebuilding a plan for creative social communication, something that is constantly under scrutiny until it gains strength and has set new objectives well beyond its official expiry date.

In other words, it is not just a matter of focusing on the outcome (this is just one step along an open, long path) but is one also of analysing the conceptual, social and cultural framework on which initiatives are based. The added value that we wish to emphasize has to do with the redistribution of knowledge and creativity in a coherent way, with the predominantly qualitative aim of expanding – through communication – the symbolic and cultural boundaries of social inclusion and granting more visibility to those who have been denied access up to now. After all is said and done, communication alone cannot be expected to bring about change, that is, its aim is not that of implementing the most adequate social policies and services - our project's vision of ethical and social nature should identify and suggest a possibly reusable and adaptable model of *integrated social communication*, one capable of fostering change at least in the medium and long terms.

Project outline

The project was launched in late January 2005 by the Municipality of Bologna, and was submitted to the European Commission to promote the Lisbon Strategy, with preliminary meetings held to appoint the steering committee. On March 21st 2005, everything had been arranged for the kick-off meeting, which introduced the project to the public together with the partners and stakeholders; it was attended by representatives of the private social sector and the local media dealing with social issues. There were nearly 130 persons. The strategic plan for establishing partnerships and developing the suggested communication tools was designed in follow-up months. Crucial, in this respect, has been the collaboration with the Aldini Valeriani-Elisabetta Sirani (a local Municipal secondary school with an advertising graphics course) and with the Master Degree in Public Communication of the University of Bologna (here called Compass). Innovative project-planning and careful consideration of the budget led to the creation of a training laboratory-workshop aimed at producing the tools for the project (audio spots, audiovisual material, posters, logo).This was developed according to a complex but efficient synergy of methods encompassing internal objectives that were common to all three institutions involved (see fig. 1): a) making young people more sensitive to social inclusion topics; b) specific training in the field of social communication; c) training in graphic design applied to social themes; d) creative production achieved in joint collaboration between school and university; e) development of a *participatory communication method*, a tool via which to get the involvement of the area's major stakeholders, local and regional authorities of Bologna and similar bodies, private companies and private social organizations, associations, the University, schools, the media etc. The aim was to develop an operational model that can be applied in other contexts, both at a national and international level, and which is flexible enough to be compatible with the specific features of every context.

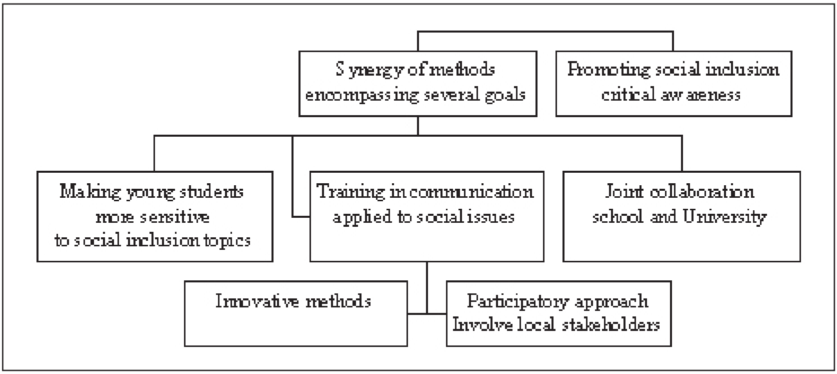

Figure 1. The Social Exclusion project: towards social inclusion through communication – inside goals

Parallel and synergic experimentation at the Aldini Valeriani-Elisabetta Sirani Institute and the University Master Compass took place in late September (in addition to the normal school and academic curricula). A group of 8 students enrolled in the second year of the Compass Master, being coordinated by three experts in social communication and supervised by a professor[2]. They established a university workshop called PubLab, which aimed to lead an integrated communication campaign against social exclusion. The 8 students who participated in the workshop actually became the key protagonists of a sort of communication agency committed to leading the campaign in a participatory way on the basis of the project that the Municipality of Bologna submitted to the European Commission; this produced, by employing the technological infrastructure of the Department of Communication Studies as much as possible, the final communication instruments: a TV spot, a radio spot and three posters. A special role in the creation of the logo and the posters was had by 16 students in the 5th class of the advertising graphics school E. Sirani of Bologna. Thus, it was a very complex exchange programme (also because of the different timetables) yet it was able to foster collaboration between the young students of a vocational training school and those of a university graduate course.

The students and coordinators of PubLab also developed a specific participation strategy for the project's 5 thematic workshops, which turned out to be a valuable opportunity to analyse the context in its entirety and become involved. PubLab was a team-working initiative conducted concurrently with the thematic workshops, and it expanded upon the various aspects of the communication campaign in a both professional and interactive way with the aim of producing and disseminating communication tools in a participatory way. The workshops were recorded with audiovisual instruments so as to produce the filmed documents which make up: a) the data needed for analysis and interpretation, to help identify the concept and the content of the communication messages; b) the material needing to be edited and used in a creative way as a focus for discussion during group work and a pre-testing of the images/words shared with partners and stakeholders in the campaign. A graphical study of the posters was made by the younger students of the Aldini-Valeriani school, even though this was not explicitly used to produce the posters (for the sake of continuity between spot and graphical product); it proved very useful and became the subject of a special exhibition organised alongside final public presentation of the campaign – which was covered by local TV channels. The choice of the campaign's logo, designed by the graphics school, also came from a common decision.

Over two months – October-November 2005 – there were organized five thematic large workshops, with several stakeholders. The topics tackled were: a) social cohesion as the motor for a new economic concept; b) communication on social exclusion and inclusion activities as a tool to foster cohesion; c) the importance of training for young people and guidance in awareness-raising actions – how to translate information in the fight against social exclusion into a language addressed to young people: Towards new forms of communication; d) a comparison of intervention models and good practice in the fight against social exclusion; e) the building of networks combating social exclusion – policies, the network process, monitoring the phenomenon. Attendance at the workshops was always high, being beyond our expectations (a total of 174 persons, from several local bodies, companies, associations, cooperatives and other University departments).

Besides participating in the workshops, which developed the contents of the communication campaign, and meeting persons from the advertising graphics course, from October to December PubLab organized about 20 meetings dedicated to the topics and tools of the campaign; and it increasingly combined the acquisition of training tools with their assessment, adaptation and gradual introduction into the project, while additionally coping with analyses of the results of stakeholder workshops. In December and January our participants shot the scenes and made recordings for the spots and posters as well as doing editing.

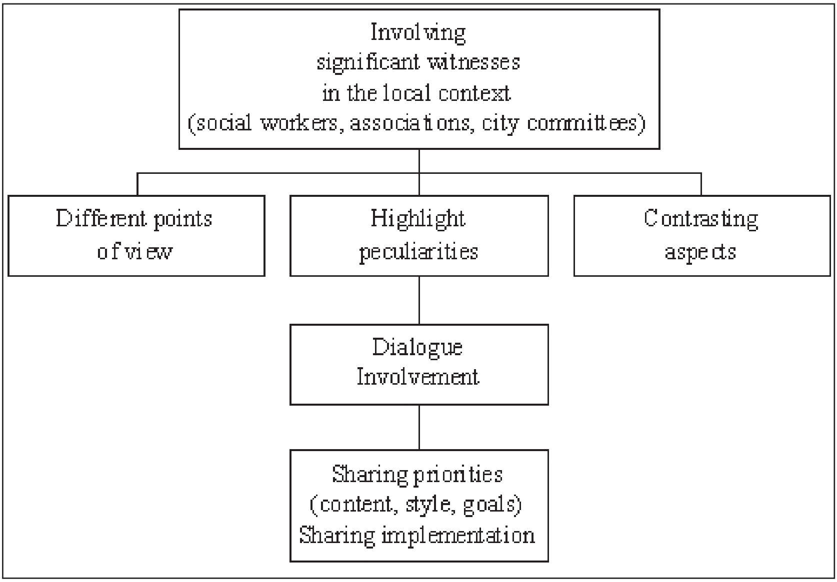

Figure 2. A participatory strategic approach in the Social Exclusion: towards social inclusion through communication campaign

The project's participatory strategy

One can summarize in four points what we consider the core philosophy on which the project was based.

1. *What is the legal framework of the project?* The so-called Lisbon Strategy, set out by the European Council, on March 2000, aims at making the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy. The mid-term review of the

objectives carried out in 2005 showed that they were no longer compatible with structural aspects of the world's economy, thus they were revised – one of the most important objectives of EU projects is the eradication of poverty and social marginalisation by the deadline laid down in the strategy. The kind of intervention envisaged by community policies is based on National Action Plans that are divided into Local Action Plans and Regional Action Plans.

2. *Active participation as a strategic approach.* The European strategy calls for the involvement of "enterprises, specialized organisations and bodies, those who deal with poverty and social marginalisation on a daily basis, the media and NGOs", as they constitute the social and communication context from which to collect data for the campaign in general; they are at the same time stakeholders to be mobilized in order to achieve change – and are affected by the radical revision of the approach to the welfare sector promoted by the EU and the different National Plans.
   We interpreted this approach by involving in the project many significant witnesses for and of the local context. With them, the social exclusion issue was able to be debated from different perspectives, highlighting its peculiarities and contrasting aspects. PubLab has thus been able to develop the creative, communication and social products via a flexible approach, characterised by three basic features (which were given priority throughout the project): *a)* active participation, *b)* compatibility with the area's specific features and situation, and *c)* the testing of innovative, creative social communication practices.
   The chosen approach is based primarily on dialogue and the involvement of project partners and participants so as to see a sharing of all the campaign's priorities concerning content, objectives and addressees. This method of working proved efficient and fruitful both as regards training and the acquisition of skills by students; and it brought forth participation from our stakeholders for the practical creation of the final products. This distinguishes participatory public communication on social exclusion from a traditional advertising campaign inspired by persuasive, marketing principles.
   The exchange of views that took place during the thematic workshops were important for all participants as they were encouraged people to provide an *active word* (Boltanski 1993), thereby contributing to the achievement of change; yet it was also due to the content of communication products, which allowed people to give significant prompts and input into creative production. All workshops were video-recorded and were used for the brainstorming/

focus groups that took place later in order to identify and analyse key aspects and the representative images needed to create the three final products.

3. The workshops' *participatory communication*, creative implementation of the campaign and the assessment it gets can be put into six main parts: the activity of listening, the sharing of rhetorical strategies; a choice of pay-off; participatory, creative choice; the dissemination plan; and shared evaluation.

3.1. The workshops were seen as *listening events*, where multiple views were looked at and debated, that *situated* opportunities facilitating alliances, there were shared understandings about social inclusion, an overthrow of any idea that it might be reduced to a matter of "economic productivity", and there were new interpretations of the various concepts laid down in the Lisbon European Strategy. Here, the analysis gave rise to several thematic bundles or key word-images for the campaign concepts.

3.2. *Shared rhetorical strategies* took place during the participatory phase. Social communication needs *actions* to match – in turn, public actions need *telling* about. So what can we do? How does one communicate information on such a complex issue as social exclusion? Two main risks are one's easily resorting to emotional or pity-evoking images in an advertising style, with the usual cliché producing an affectation, thus a lower 'punch' from a contingent campaign dealing with strong, everyday stereotypes. We did not want to take a shortcut because the objectives might see the overthrowing of a cliché opposing economic productivity to cultural co-production. Then, we preferred a path of symbolic opening against the signal language of a strict advertising style. Not wishing to display mere victimisation, this meant finding a positive message via a concrete person, i.e. and not just schematic generalisation using stereotypes; the goal was an invitation to think, an awareness empowerment, not solely an ephemeral emotional attention-grabbing. The core idea was use of the *active ambivalence* of irony to trigger reflection.

3.3. Therefore, *the pay-off for the campaign* was to play with the key words of the Lisbon Strategy, adapting them to shared interpretations while inviting the spectator to take a look at so-called marginal people from another perspective: *Change of perspective pays! For all!*

3.4. The *participatory creation choices* gave rise to the creation of spots directly with some of our partners, i.e. not professional characters but with persons who actually experience and know about exclusion - this so as to communicate through *persons* rather than through actors. Also, a choice of irony usage to overthrow prejudice played with the idea of 'equalization' of the excluded and included in the "employment" category (as the Lisbon Strategy suggests); it was utilising another perspective, one ironical but at the same time a positive cultural proposal.

3.5. *Beyond the spot: suggestions for participatory dissemination*. To reach a broad and undifferentiated public, a social communication campaign with such a wide range of topics should make use of all dissemination vehicles possible, not only classical means of communication but also the social and territorial ones that employ new communication models. Yet incorporation of reaction and feedback into the dissemination plan as central elements of the plan itself would be far from easy. The aim is to accompany dissemination with opportunities and tools that allow us to assess the effect concurrently with the spot's dissemination; this would not only stimulate the *reaction word* but also create a *public space where words can meet* and join together. As our quote at the beginning of this report says: "…a spectacle like this cannot find a justification within itself, but must be oriented towards the springing into world action" (Boltanski 1993); this means that the *interactive and dialectical participation* of the public to which the message is/might be addressed must become the core of the dissemination. In short, what we need is a participatory dissemination plan. The objectives consisted of reaching out to the broadest and most varied public possible to raise awareness of social exclusion themes and motivating social sector stakeholders, from bodies to organisations, to work for the goals set out in the Lisbon Strategy. The target is not then differentiated – an excessive segmentation might focus persons' attention on one aspect of social exclusion only, without taking into account the issue as a whole, in all its complexity. Moreover, a distinction between excluded and included would make one move away from the subject, thereby acting as a discriminating factor ("us" the included, and "them" – who? – the excluded) and go against one of the aims of the spot, which is not to arouse feelings of compassion but, rather, to consider the excluded of today as the potential included of tomorrow. The complexity of the issue led to the use of stereotypical pictures recognizable by the greater part of the public – and these were dismantled and redefined through the use of irony, making their viewing more palatable. Special attention was devoted to the world of work, with the aim of encouraging public bodies, entrepreneurs, the third sector and the economy to follow the guidelines laid down in the Lisbon Strategy.

The greater challenge faced by dissemination is that of combining classical media and territorial dissemination with a participatory dissemination strategy (i.e. by virtual blog in Internet sites of project partners, real blog for small and large public debate, training blogs as actions in schools coming from creative workshops with pupils and teachers). A creative and interactive multimedia product might show us which actions, social communication and reactions could be inextricably linked – in a potentially endless chain process of participatory social communication, where the dialectical participation of citizens in the dissemination phase ensures a deeper social impact than might classical dissemination. The classical dissemination (partly realised) consisted of simultaneous dissemination of the three advertising products (video spot, radio spot and poster), which were developed according to a shared pattern through traditional vehicles but also via alternative tool usage. This was even more necessary if we consider the limited budget available and the cosmopolitan public of some locations (e.g. the big Municipal Library at the heart of the city, several local social centres and health services, schools, university, locations managed by the project's partners and stakeholders, shopping malls, etc.). Thus some radio stations hosted the spot also on their sites, some local television had it in their news programs, and posters (paper and digital) appeared in locations made available for free by partners, stakeholders, private bodies and enterprises involved in the project in relation to corporate social responsibility, etc. One example of such participatory dissemination was a sort of "training blog" – that is, an opportunity to use the spot and other materials, in particular a re-elaboration of the building process as it happened in the case of a local middle school (see fig. 3).

3.6. Post-production assessment: focus groups, interviews and plan reviews. Citizens from various social backgrounds and politicians representing the project's partners gave their opinions during the evaluation phase. The strong points that emerged are the following:

a) The efficacy of reflective *empowerment*: with the exception of two cases (a member of the city council and two homeless persons), viewing or listening to the spots fosters debate and reflection, and impressions formed by the words/images of real life situations that give insight into "reality" episodes of forced and contradictory exclusion provide food for reflection, often matched by a need to find a practical solution to the negative effects of disparities through greater cohesion in everyday life as well as in the political and economic spheres.

b) The efficacy of the ironical paradox and attention capturing: favourable opinions regarding innovative departures from persuasive messages or those based on victim ostentation.

c) Efficient stimulation via prompting words that trigger off storytelling call to mind contradictory experiences, hurdles already overcome but also untackled ones, expressing a broadly shared need to go beyond a rigid boundary between exclusion and inclusion, something that seems obsolete and overly narrow when compared with the complex situations and challenges being faced today (e.g. relations with immigrants, lonely homeless persons with whom nobody tries to communicate or even just joke, a shared need to broaden one's own horizons and come to terms with the fear of not being recognized as a fellow person or becoming an 'invisible' person, etc.).

d) Efficacy of the message, enhanced by the intensity of the sound rhythm and the immediacy of scenes shot with real persons, displaying spontaneity and a realistic view of the world.

e) Acceptance of the invitation to make social cohesion a visible priority and a convenient objective for all despite there being fears and contradictions stemming from superficial generalizations associated with a lack of awareness of individual-personal situations.

f) Awareness of the need to provide more opportunities to learn more about each other.

Some negative aspects were identified by a few participants, too: a) excessive use of paradox eventually leading to misunderstanding – because not sufficiently close to "real suffering"; b) a risk of causing prejudiced reactions which are even more discriminating, by mistaking the irony of the paradox for the suggestion of new jobs which will be paid for by public institutions; c) the difference in the conversational register of the two ironical spot episodes showing persons affected by exclusion (window cleaners and homeless persons) and the third one showing an immigrant who has become a businessman – in which the only anti-predjudice element is the fact that he is giving employment to an Italian citizen.

The first two negative points (which surfaced in very few cases) nonetheless stressed the importance of the strategic objective that had already been identified during the project-planning phase, while reinforcing it: participation promotion and the dissemination of communication products - here a priority, as opposed to the classical type of dissemination – through identification of specific feedback and the incorporation tools for audiences' words. What is more, the debate carried out during the evaluation phase confirmed the efficacy of creative social communication products, especially in interventions that combine word and action (as evidenced by the campaign's logo ComunicAzione, which can be translated as *CommunicAction*; see fig. 4), which do not aim at 'persuading' but rather at contextualising the problem and raising awareness. In other words, the integrated communication strategy becomes the most efficient element as it brings together mediated messages and *community* intervention, enabling the mediated tool to prompt a word that might really exert influence due to the invincible strength of interpersonal, proxemic and co-present relations - which might bring about real action to achieve change. The last point falls into a current debate over the empowerment strategies had via creative social communication; this is associated with a complex and still unresolved conceptual issue of a social-cognitive nature on the consistency of a rhetorical register, which will certainly be tackled in follow-up experiences.

4. *Conceptual, creative aspects*. Assessment of the communication campaign's conceptual framework, used as a tool to combat social exclusion, highlights the shifting model of communication represented as significant change from postal persuasive transmission to ritual or orchestral understanding dialogue (Carey 1985; Winkin 1996; Lalli 1996; 2011). With regard to community empowerment, the communicator assumes the role of a network and word-action facilitator, reinforcing the community's self-esteem and confidence in its actions – a n active, participatory advocacy is needed with short, medium and long-term effects. The marketing engineering model (Floris 2001), with objectives measurable only in the short-term, is therefore inadequate because it does not take into account the complexity of the topic and is incompatible with the context as it is based on a linear, hierarchical message and the transmission of persuasive information aimed at a passive target. If a model like this were applied to a specific project, it would not make any change in the minds of citizens nor directly influence their attitudes. A concerted and participatory model was created via which persons and social groups might *learn* something as they have multiple experiences influenced by competitive sources (e.g. "negative" competitors: crime news, consumer hedonism, fear of anything different, the invisibility of personal stories leading to both generalization and depersonalization, etc.); attention should thus be directed towards the need to overthrow stereotypes, by avoiding "sermons and homilies" or, even worse, the spread of a sense of guilt among citizens. Persons should instead feel free to establish relations with their fellow citizens reflexively. Identifying a social communication model was welcomed by stakeholders precisely because it turned out to be multi-strategic, collaborative, gradual and flexible, participatory, and ready to listen and to adapt to what is needed in the phases of the network process – its tasks were laid out, but its limits were also apparent in relation to the action of social players; it can raise awareness and obtain support for individual and collective action provided that it is *not*

a substitute for such actions and does not impose compelling, overbearing messages and information; finally, it aimed to integrate the communication on social exclusion into contexts that foster changes in policies, interaction, and favours interrelations between different factors and topics connected with the issue and between the different levels involved.

A socially integrated communication could endeavour to facilitate knowing, to make it easier for persons to exchange views and reflect – which presupposes that nobody can act as a source of absolute truth, but anybody can turn to communication as if it were an essential *gatekeeper* and an advocacy promoter of awareness to facilitate situations in which all players may envisage new prospects for the future, especially through forms of reciprocal, cross-level and multi-step cooperation-information flow. Setting objectives with a broader scope and for the medium-/long-term provides some resources *for action work* and considers the possibility of further expansion during follow-up and longer-lasting integrated communication projects that might be based on encouraging signs emanating from the innovative experimentation that has taken place (and also in terms of concerted action between diverse bodies and institutions with regard to training and research intervention).

Conclusions

The complexity of the problems associated with social exclusion was the *core* of the communication plan. Besides difficulties associated with the media, i.e. in their not giving positive visibility to this topic – for stigmatising is much easier – there has been long debate over the risk of reducing the problem to a mere report on this or that sort of human victimization.

To make such a multifaceted question visible to the public and draw its attention to it, one could, for example, swing between two opposite poles: on one hand, that of building an emotional appeal through images of strong victimization and derision, showing representations of exclusion situations, running the risk of being swallowed as a sort of *pornography of suffering* or an economically-oriented inclusion standard; on the other, a "commercial-persuasive" style might have imitated the aesthetical approach to everyday life offered by advertising spots, showing, for example, the "accidents" and "ordeals" caused by ill-management of the social sector – by an individual or a group – held responsible for mistakes that might be somehow redeemed by adopting an either more charitable or more aggressive attitude towards generic social injustice.

We are faced with a great challenge: the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion are not only financial or social, political or cultural. The symbolic meaning of the word *boundary* or border urges reflection, not "persuasion" – reflecting on a prejudice that haunts our everyday life and hits other human beings who appear weak or are regarded as victims or who threaten one's safety only because the prevailing symbolic representation makes them appear like this, ignoring things held in common and any opportunity to establish relations.

So when we designed the spots and posters, we deliberately avoided any victimization or sense of guilt and set ourselves instead the ambitious objective of awareness-prompting, a new perspective arising from the possibility of change. Then we need to communicate a possible shifting of the boundary by doing away with this perspective – with our creative choice pressing the rhetorical accelerator, not to go faster but *to stop and think,* even for a second, in order to facilitate the "magical moment" of *cultural shock* that will allow dialogue to take place and make sense of everything (as the European-African artist Simon Njami said in an interview).

This is the reason why the posters and the spots have a documentary-like pattern and did not employ professional actors: the back shots of window cleaners at traffic lights (their faces covered to keep anonymity), the face of an immigrant now heading an association of immigrants, or other active witnesses belonging to existing social cooperatives, or the city committee against social exclusion, or the ex-homeless person merely playing himself (see fig. 5-7); thus a concrete representation based on an ironical quasi-economic paradox and using - even as a provocation – the positive strength of the pay-off 'signal' as a facilitating factor to produce a factual impression of the almost impossible overthrow of prejudice; and this without forgetting the valuable and active presence of the *network of practical mediators* (the "non-professional", non-"simulated", non-"legendary" actors in the spots), the only ones who can attain the goal of action change in a comprehensive and pluralistic way.

This integrated communication approach also included, as said, a flexible and participatory dissemination plan aimed not only at the well-known general public through the use of traditional channels but also, and primarily, at a series of diversified experiences, which in turn foster multiple initiatives focussing on change, social and symbolic creativity. This is not about 'final products', nor attained goals – it is just a step incorporated in the broader process: players' engaged in social exclusion getting one's attention via communication based on the assumption that there cannot be any effective communication without accompanying action and, similarly, actions cannot take place if nobody speaks about them. If the communicative *visibility* of actions is not supported or if there are no networks of practical mediation that make it easier to shift the limit of cultural boundaries, both internal and external, the impact might be reduced to the superficial and fragile dimension of the cliché and the overly easy generalist consensus.

Future attention must therefore be directed towards identification of new, possible alliances aimed at inclusion activities: communication allows one to work in networks and have a flexible gate-keeping approach regarding exclusion issues – the opening/closing of this or that door of *public visibility* for social themes also entails more opportunities to disseminate social capital and cultural and symbolic pluralism.
As Joyce said in *Ulysses*,

> *Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signature of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. Then he was aware of them bodies before of them coloured. How? By knocking his sconce against them, sure. Go easy. Bald he was and a millionaire, maestro di color che sanno. Limit of the diaphane in. Why in? Diaphane, adiaphane. If you can put your five fingers through it, it is a gate, if not a door. Shut your eyes and see*[3].

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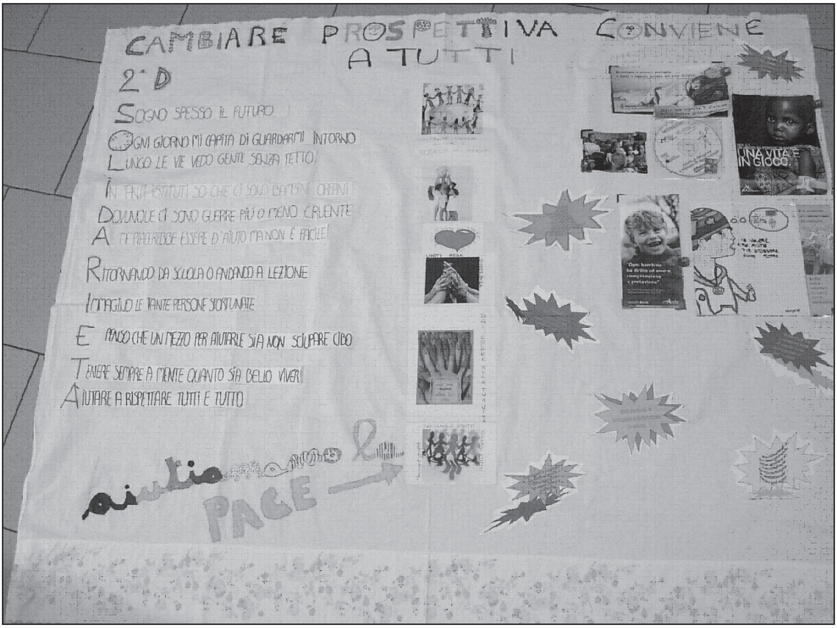

Figure 3. An example of the campaign's re-activing process in a middle school: new elaborations from pupils

Figure 4. The brand logo of the Social Exclusion: towards social inclusion through communication campaign

Figure 5. One of the posters for the Social Exclusion: towards social inclusion through communication campaign (the immigrant is the employer who supports workplaces and the economy in the building sector)

Figure 6. One of the posters for the Social Exclusion: towards social inclusion through communication campaign (homeless person looking for old things in the garbage, represented as a dustman dealing with separated collection)

Figure 7. One of the posters for the Social Exclusion: towards social inclusion through communication campaign (the window cleaner as an Observer of city traffic; in the spot, there was a real window cleaner shot from the back, in order to protect his identity as an illegal immigrant)

Notes

1 UE Project directed by the Municipality of Bologna (Nicoletta Ratini, U.I. International Relations, and Viviana Verzieri, Social Services). Partners: Region Emilia-Romagna, Social Politics, Province of Bologna, LegaCoop, Local Health Service of Bologna, Master in Public and Social Communication- University of Bologna, Forum of the associations of migrant peoples of Bologna and Province; Permanent Committee against social exclusion-Bologna, Department of Prison Administration; Union CGIL). The communication campaign is available in its entirety at the following site: http://www.compass.unibo.it/publab.htm (last read on 15-11-2011).

2 The students were: Annamaria Capriglia, Gessica Carbone, Michelangelo De Maio, Federico Fabbri, Claudia Giommarini, Elisa Rosso, Marco Rullo, Francesca Sau. The tutors of the workshop were Diego Botta, Michela De Falco and Andrea Segre, in collaboration with Luca Rosini. Scientific Supervision: Pina Lalli.

3 Quoted in Brighenti (2007, p. 323) .

Gyöngyi Rózsa

MUNICIPALITY CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Introduction

"*If you want peace, be prepared for war.*" This ancient Greek saying is the basic principle for today's crisis management, too. When a crisis hits a community, an institution or a company, it is mostly too late to start preparing crisis management strategies and decide on proper communication principles. The most successful crisis management method is simply to be *prepared* for crises and to prevent avoidable crisis situations with professional preparations and in-time crisis management.

Recent years have shown that domestic natural disasters and man-made, business-related incidents can become national crises very rapidly. We live in the era of information technology – and information is transferred very quickly thanks to television, radio, mobile phones and the internet. A very small local incident may turn into a national crisis very soon with the help of traditional and social media.

All municipalities may have to face up to crisis situations. Major accidents, natural and industrial disasters could happen anywhere and at any time in a country. Local governments have to be prepared to handle these situations properly. Disasters that happened recently in Hungary show us how important it is for an organization or institute to be able to act in the correct way in a crisis situation. Ask the mayor of Kolontár or Devecser whether they ever thought that they might experience the biggest industrial disasters in Europe! (Redsludge Tragedy in 2010)

Such disasters are mainly unavoidable, but municipalities have to be prepared to prevent avoidable crises – and if the unavoidable happens, then how to handle them successfully. When a crisis hits, one of the key elements within proper crisis management is the communications attitude; how the organization communicates with its target audiences. With proper communication strategies and techniques one may even turn a bad story into a positive being honest, showing empathy and willingness to help and solve the problem.

Dealing with a crisis (and especially the communication aspect of it) is an attitude. But it is also a very practical and expertly executed action plan that assumes such prerequisites as training and professional qualifications. Success will largely depend on how well we have prepared ourselves to deal with the issues at hand.

This publication was aimed to help Hungarian municipalities build their own Crisis Communication Plan and to give them advice on crisis management preparations and on how to handle the media successfully before and after a crisis hits an area or an organization.

This manual cannot guarantee that one can avoid all types of crisis situation, yet it may help one detect the first signs of a potential crises, solve most of them before they evoke, and act fast and properly if a crisis hits.

Types of Crises

Definition

A crisis is any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of an organization; it is usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention. Such a situation might be any kind of legal dispute, theft, accident, fire, flood or a man-made disaster that could be attributed to your organization. It might also be a situation where in the eyes of the media or general public your organization did not react to one of the above situations in an appropriate manner.

When faced with this type of situation, "**incident**" must be distinguished from **"crisis".** An **incident** may be:

- A local problem;
- Something that does not lead to undesired media attention, now or in the future;
- Does not affect the health of citizens, employees or neighbours;
- Does not affect nature or the environment;
- Something that is not connected to an important person or authority (police, judiciary, offices of health, agriculture, consumer protection, environmental protection, etc.)

A minor local story may well become the top news of the day on national television if not handled correctly. For example, a dissatisfied ex-employee might turn to the media at any time, easily creating a national story from something that may have a negative impact on the image of the local municipality regardless of the truth. In communications, the winner is always the one who acts/talks first!

Local incidents like this can be dealt with and solved locally with proper preparation, communication, negotiation and compromises.

Example

Ten years ago a negative article appeared in a local daily paper about an FMCG firm, stating that hygiene conditions were very poor in the company's production plant. The author of the article said that rats and mice had been seen by employees on production lines. The story was covered by the local paper only, though a few smaller local portals also covered it. A national news agency was willing to publish it when the firm's PR experts asked the agency to give them some time to find out what had been happening.

After a short investigation, it turned out that the story was told to the regional journalist by a laid-off employee who had been caught stealing – and he had only generated the story to do harm to his ex-employer.

So the issue was dealt with and the news agency was informed about it; the story died, it did not make it to 'top story' in the news of the day.

Yet without proper crisis management it may not have ended like this...

Crisis situations:

- An incident that cannot be resolved soon becomes a crisis;
- Threats, blackmail, and fraud are always crises
- Fire and natural disasters
- Business interruption (computer service breakdown, intrusion into a web page, service providers' breakdowns)
- Employment issues (lay-offs, dismissal, personal life issues, investigations, scandals)
- Acts of violence (harassment, stalking, terrorism, vandalism, bodily harm, etc.)
- Hostage-taking
- Accidents in the workplace (personal injury or death)
- Media investigation of the municipality, its management, employees, local public institutes, subcontractors etc.
- Public protests and demonstrations

Example

Fire in the Prime Minister's Office

Some years ago a small local fire broke out in a bureau in the building of the Prime Ministers' Office. The fire was soon detected and put out in 5 minutes by 2 National Guards in the building. It was thought to be a small incident that was handled properly. The office is, however, one of the most protected government buildings and, being such, fire instructions there are much stricter than anywhere else. The fire alarm was connected directly to the Central Fire Department. Some minutes later, a fire siren was heard in the street and 3-4 fire trucks with at least 20 firefighters were heading rapidly to the building. One got an impression that the firefighters had arrived to put out a very serious fire. As soon as the firefighters entered the building, the first news item appeared on the net, with a sensational title: Prime Minister's Office is on fire! Yet the article was heavily exaggerated, for there was no major fire. It was late in the evening but, luckily, PR people for the office were still working. As soon as the firefighters arrived they informed the governmental spokesperson about what had actually happened; and they coordinated communication points with spokespersons of the firefighters' department and a National Guard spokesperson. The governmental spokesperson immediately informed the press of the facts via sending out a press release, answered journalists' incoming questions – and soon after this the story in the media was covered correctly, so soon died.

The event had a happy ending in another way as well: the brave National Guards who had dealt with the fire were given awards for their quick work!

Basic Principles for Succesful Crisis Communication

Image Building, Corporate Identity, Corporate Image and Public Relations

Are you a good corporate citizen? Do your target audiences see you as a reliable, cooperative, helpful and honest organization? Do you have a Corporate Image? Do you treat your 'targets' as partners? Do you use PR strategies to build confidence, understanding and support within your exterior and interior relations?

Municipalities have to understand that all they do, say, and the way they behave determines what their interior and exterior relations think about them. This is called the 'Corporate Image'. Being a good corporate citizen will help one prevent a crisis – and if the unavoidable happens this will help one manage a stressful situation much more easily.

Municipalities should develop their Corporate Identity and behave according to principles that suit their Corporate Image. Corporate Identity is an enduring symbol of how an organization views itself, how it wishes itself to be viewed by others, and how others will recognize and remember it. Corporate Identity is used to define the overall communication program of an organization in relation to interior and exterior targets.

There are many things that determine an organization's image: Corporate Philosophy, Corporate Culture, Corporate Structure, Corporate Behaviour, the self-esteem of employees, their opinion about their workplace and management, the quality of the organization's services, events, press relations, visual symbols, etc.

If a municipality has poor client services, does not seek out local inhabitants' opinions before making big decisions, closes its doors to the local business sphere, NGOs, minorities or the press, does not care about employees' opinions (etc.), it will soon face incidents that might easily become major crises. Organizations like this will not have any supporters in troubled times.

There are a lot of stories that grew into top 'negative story' of the day on national television. Most of these local incidents became a crisis as they were not properly handled by the local authorities. For example, disappointed parents organized demonstrations in Hungary's capital as their municipality closed down a kindergarden/primary school without involving them in the decision-making process and without listening to their proposals or seeking a compromise after the decision had been made – yet such could have been avoided with good behaviour and communication coming from the local authority.

A lot of municipalities are having financial problems now - and, unfortunately, many negative decisions have to be made; so there will always be someone who is hurt. Yet the negative effect of situations like this can be reduced if the municipality makes an effort to tell locals why this decision was unavoidable and to get opinion about the situation. Such an organization should behave like a good corporate citizen: who cares about its main targets, organizes forums, visits parents, has press briefings for the media, involves all local opinion-leaders in decision–making. It could well turn out to be a win-win situation if persons see that you want to know their opinion.

Municipalities need to come up with a Communication Plan that will help them build confidence, and gain mutual understanding and support from their ‘targets’; and this strategy should be the foundation of the Crisis Communication Plan.

The Communication Plan should comprise the following: target audiences (interior/exterior), goals, core messages, communication strategy and PR tools relating to the targets to achieve one’s goals.

One needs to plan all activities, services and decision-making from the perspective of communication, too; i.e. one should study potential communications risks in all activities. Appropriate communication tools for the targets must be utilized to get their understanding and support.

There are lot of internal and external communication tools that a municipality can use:

Internal communication tools

- Management meetings
- Employee meetings, forums
- Interior newsletter, newspaper
- Intranet
- Opinion-box
- Employee surveys
- Employee events (parties, trips)
- CSR (collecting presents, food for people in need, voluntary jobs to help the settlement’s environment etc.)
- Rewards for best employees
- etc.

External communication tools of the municipality

Personal relations

- Client service
- Reception hours of local representatives and leaders

Local events and celebrations

- Local forums for issues of public interest
- Public hearings
- Business forums

- Municipality events
- Local minority events – support and participation
- NGOs’ events

Website, other internet sites (FB, blog, Youtube, Twitter….)
Press relations, press events (press conferences, background talks, press releases, interviews, etc.)
- Local and national media (print, electronic, online)

Advertisements, communication campaigns (outdoor, print leaflets, publications, TV, radio spots, print ads)
Sponsorship
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Crisis Communication

Developing Good Relations with Target Audiences

Media relations

One of the key elements of stopping incidents becoming crises is to build good relations with the press – and not just for possible crisis but on a day-to-day basis. Advice is: be open to journalists and editors; be willing to help them in their work. Inform them on a regular basis about your organization’s plans and projects and help their work. Involve them in all important regional issues. Provide them with background information and treat them as partners, rather than enemies. Building up good relations with the press, using proactive communication strategies will help one to get into the local – perhaps national – news with good stories..

It is also necessary for the communication professional and for those with the right to talk to the press to understand what the media and their audiences expect of you. You have to know exactly what kind of information a particular paper needs, i.e. what is interesting and understandable for its readers. Tabloids, for instance, need clear, simple-worded information with dramatic photos – and they will be more likely to publish what you give them if you understand their needs; while an upmarket paper will require something more professional and more detailed, so, for example, using technical terms is ‘a must’ with them.

One needs to build up one’s organization’s image with communication, which is more than just placing necessary statements, local regulations etc. in the local paper. Press-related events, conferences, background talks, open houses to involve the press in all local occurrences, regularly made press releases – all of these are of use.

The "*no comment strategy*" does not work. One should be proactive in any communication, informing the press on a regular basis about one's organization and about things happening in the area. You should build up personal relations with your most important media, and they will turn to *you first* in a crisis situation rather than ask someone else – perhaps an enemy – or create a story based on local gossip or rumour.

An organization that closes its doors to the media or who ignores them and their publication is likely to have trouble in a time of crisis. Yet if the media feels you are being fair and honest with them, they will rely on your opinion in troubled times as well.

Interior/exterior relations

One should be a responsible and open organization that builds good relations with its interior and exterior partners. Involve your employees in major local issues, and count on your exterior relations' opinions and professional advice.

When thinking of crisis situations most people think of major, natural/industry-related disasters, but most of the time minor local issues can become real crises, ones threatening the image and reputation of a municipality. There are several examples of this. Looking at them, at first we could say they had nothing to do with local administration – yet they do have an impact on your organization's image.

A municipality employee is accused of posting naked photos on a community website; a local teacher is accused of molesting his pupils; a mayor getting into a fight with his local political competitor; a local administration member hits a child on a pedestrian crossing without stopping and giving help… Stories like this become top news on evening newsreels. So it is important how local leaders react to such situations and how they communicate them to their targets, that is, the local/regional and national media, etc. One should never forget that it is easy to get the media's attention with negative, scandalous news. It is more difficult to raise the media's attention and to get into the news if you do not act and communicate rapidly and properly.

Before the Crisis – Preparations

The most important aspect of crisis management is preparing for a crisis. When a crisis breaks, it is then too late to merely begin planning/completing things i.e. instigate communications, messages, making the necessary interior/exterior contact list, choose a Crisis Team, appoint a spokesperson, have ready-to-use press release templates, have an infrastructure to operate the crisis team or to answer journalists' questions, etc.

Crisis preparation is about hoping for the best – but one should be prepared even for the worst situation that can happen to your organization.

This chapter deals with the preparations that are necessary for any organization to be prepared for a crisis situation while solving potential crises if they can be avoided and acting swiftly and well in an unavoidable crisis situation.

The Crisis Team

Municipalities should set up a crisis communication team that is responsible for preparing and implementing crisis communication plans and for handling all interior and exterior relations and making all decisions in terms of particular issues. The mayor or the notary of the municipality should be Head of the Crisis Team. To make sure the team can make decisions when the Head is away, there should also be a deputy team leader. Other members of the team should consist of people in charge of other municipality departments involved in crisis management as well as representatives/decision-makers in local public services. Some back-up professionals and advisers should additionally be invited to help in cases of a very professional nature.

It is advisable to set up the team with only a minimum number of people to make sure the team can work swiftly and effectively and to guarantee confidentiality. Each team member should be given a specific assignment besides providing information from his special field.

Who should Crisis Team members be?

- Mayor- Head of Crisis Team
- Notary- Deputy Head
- Crisis Team Secretariat
- Leaders/Experts of Departments involved in the crisis situation
- Communication Leader/Advisor
- Head of HR (in case interior communication belongs to HR)
- Head of the Security Services
- Head of Client Services
- Decision-makers from other organizations involved in solving the crisis (police, fire department, ambulance, weather forecast, water supply, gas supply, electric works, transportation etc.)

Some other experts might also be invited to participate in Crisis Team decision-making to help with professional points of view.

The team should make decisions relating to the following areas:

- General rules for the operations of the Crisis Team – rules for summoning the team, the person responsible for summoning the team meeting, confidentiality principles, etc.
- Appoint Head and Deputy Head of the Crisis Team
- Rights and responsibilities for members, responsibility areas
- CT infrastructure and budget – secretariat, meeting room, Crisis Management Centre, press room etc., with responsible persons
- The spokesperson/deputy-spokesperson
- Experts to be involved in special crisis situations
- Ways of communication between members (mobile, e-mail, EDR radio etc.)
- Regularity of team meetings
- Agenda for the CT
- Crisis management principles
- Principles of interior/exterior communication, members in charge
- Principles for handling the press
- Necessary contact lists
- etc.

The crisis team's task

The Crisis Team is responsible for preparing the Crisis Communication Plan of the municipality. The team is in charge of defining crisis situations beforehand and handling them if they occur. The crisis team decides on follow-up steps in a crisis situation. The team should be prepared in every step and take them first in a given situation. Given a crisis, it is recommended that the team has meetings every day analysing the previous day's outcomes.

THE SPOKEPERSON

In a crisis situation, it is important to have a person who is in charge of exterior communications. S/he is the one who is in charge of media relations, who will represent the organization at interviews, television studio talks etc. In order to be able to direct the flow of exterior communication it is important to make sure that among all employees s/he is the *only one* who talks to the press. In a case of any incoming call from a journalist via reception or on a mobile phone, organizations have to make sure that employees know what to say *(Please contact our spokesperson*) and how to react.

A back-up to the designated spokesperson should also be appointed to substitute for the primary spokesperson when s/he is unavailable.

Some other professionals may also be appointed as spokespersons for a special field – finance, construction, health, transportation, etc. – in case the crisis strikes a complex area that needs professionals' explanations as well.

The ideal spokesperson should have the following features:

- Someone who is comfortable in front of a TV camera, in a studio and with reporters
- Skilled in handling the media
- Able to establish credibility with the media
- Sincere, straightforward, believable, has charisma
- Can stay calm in a stressful situation
- Can express the municipality's viewpoint in a way that is understood by non-professionals too, but who can also talk about professional issues
- Some who is always be reachable to answer journalist questions either by phone or for early morning/late night television programmes

Besides having a designated municipality spokesperson in a crisis situation it is important to identify spokespersons of other organizations that might be involved in dealing with the crisis (police, fire department, health officials, public transport etc.) and get in touch with them so that in such a crisis the different organizations' crisis communication strategy and implementation might be synchronized and co-ordinated, while involving all communications experts.

Comnnunication/Media Training

After choosing the spokesperson there should be communications /media training for him/her and for other Crisis Team members who have a right to give information to the press.

A crisis situation is always difficult to handle as regards the media; reporters and journalists are likely to ask the toughest questions, on air. Therefore, to be confident and to be prepared for the worst journalistic questions, rehearsals are necessary for spokespersons.

During such training, the trainers will practice with real-life situations – press conferences, interviews, TV and radio appearances with participants to prepare them for the toughest questions. The communication team should prepare a Q&A list for the spokesperson, one consisting of all possible journalistic questions – with proposed answers.

Crisis Communication Plan

Municipalities must have Disaster Plans, part of which should be the Crisis Communication Plan. The Crisis Communication Plan defines how to control and manage communications in the organization as well as how to control and manage a crisis. The Crisis Communication Plan will help the municipality to act fast and properly when a crisis hits.

Aspects of a Crisis Communication Plan

1. *Situation analysis: detecting municipalities strengths and weaknesses*
2. *Crisis Team (see above) – members, their roles, CT organization rules, secretariat, location, communication rules between team members*
3. *Key audiences – interior/exterior*
4. *Messages for each target*
5. *Communication strategy and tools*
6. *Rules for handling the media*
7. *Prepared statements*
8. *Post-crisis analysis*
9. *Appendix: templates and lists of all relations (Crisis Team telephone number/ e-mail etc. list, lists of all interior and exterior relations, media contact lists, list of spokespersons for other organizations, experts lists etc.)*

Situation Analysis: Detecting Weaknesses and Stronger Areas

You have to know and understand your organization very well: its structure, the mission statement, its history, past, present and future challenges... One should have a corporate identity and should be able to identify and understand one's main target(s). Unless you truly understand your organization, you won't know how to address challenges when in a crisis, who your audience really is, or the potential impact of a crisis on your organization.

As important as it is to understand your strengths, it is even more critical to know your weaknesses/areas of vulnerability – thus to understand these weaknesses and either work to correct them or be prepared to communicate them when a crisis strikes. This is where a crisis communication plan is helpful; you note a problem, anticipate what type of crisis may occur – even after one has taken precautions - and then note a set of steps to take so as to handle the situation and communicate with others during the crisis.

The Crisis Team

The Crisis Communication Plan includes rules and basic principles relating to the Crisis Team: members of the Team, its operating rules and responsibilities, the role of the Crisis Team member responsible for communication, rules for interior and exterior communications and communication participants within and outside the organization in the crisis situation. The plan should lay down clear guidelines regarding how the Crisis Communication Plan is set up and how it will be accepted and implemented by the Crisis Team.

Key Audiences

One section of a Crisis Communication Plan is about your organization's interior and exterior relations, relations that you should always consider even during one's normal, daily operations; identifying them and getting to know them as well as you can is of major importance for successful communication.

Interior Audiences

- Employees (and their families)
- Heads of Department
- Other management members
- Board of Representatives
- etc.

Exterior Audiences

- Local citizens
- Local institutes, organizations
- Business sector, local enterprises
- Local and national press

- Associations, representations, foundations
- Sister-cities
- NGOs
- Potential investors
- Tourists (Hungarian and foreign)
- Regional and governmental relations
- etc.

Messages for each Target

After defining the target audiences you should work out the main messages when in a crisis situation. These messages should be the basis of all crisis communication used, and via all kinds of crisis communication tools – press releases, press conferences, interviews, letters etc. The spokesperson should stick to these and repeat them in all types of communication.

There may well be different messages composed for different target groups - yet they should differ only in their style of wording.

What kinds of message should the basic crisis communication message be?

An organization should first state in its crisis communication the facts: what, where, when something happened, the people involved – and the steps already taken and to be taken in the future to solve the problem as soon as possible. An organization should also take responsibility for a crisis if there is one and should not hide and lie in its communication. The main messages should also include the attitude of the organization regarding what happened, and they should display sorrow and empathy.

When developing messages, one should try to avoid negatives – and turn them into positives instead. Never lie, never use technical jargon. Your message should be clear, short and should show your concern about persons affected by the crisis.

Do not create more than 3-5 main messages for a crisis situation, and stick to them in all target communications.

Communication Strategy and Tools

This is the most important part of the Crisis Communication Plan. After determining the potential crisis situation, the key targets and the key messages, a communication strategy should be worked out concerning how to convey such messages to your targets, with the communication tools. The plan should contain all communication tools to be used with internal/external targets. There should also be a time schedule and budget for all proposed activities, and the responsible persons must be indicated.

For instance, a municipality may decide to reach all locals via an immediate forum with the Crisis Team or the mayor speaking, or it could decide to make a printed newsletter, to be delivered to all households. There are a lot of interior and exterior tools in communication, and one has to choose the ones that are most likely to work effectively in your situation.

Municipality websites and all other online surfaces should be updated with crisis information and necessary steps for all targets. Municipalities can open a Crisis Topic on their websites and, if they use new media tools like Facebook or Twitter, provide constant information and feedback about the situation to local and other targets. These web pages will give one an opportunity to judge your targets' reactions and feelings and plan your next crisis steps while taking these reactions into consideration.

The media should be informed first by a short statement that can be sent via a press release form or can be revealed at a press briefing. National media should also be reached with several possible tools - press releases, interviews, background materials, press events etc.

Do not forget to provide all the necessary press information on your official website - or open a new site that solely deals with Crisis Management.

The press should be served well 'at times of peace' as well; the official websites of municipalities should have a Press Room that contains, first of all, a contact persons' list for the press (e-mail, mobile, fax, etc.); and all press materials published by the municipality. A picture and video gallery should also exist.

You should bear in mind that in case the press or other targets cannot get their information – that which is authentic – from you, they will try to get it from someone else. It is not enough for a municipality to have some good local media contacts and from time to time give information only to them. All of the press should have access to all information necessary – and they must be able to find this easily (even if they never dealt with your municipality before).

Rules for Handling the Media

The Crisis Communication Plan should include rules for handling the media. These rules may be similar to media handling rules that are used in an organization's Communication Plan, though there may be different rules for a crisis situation.

There should be rules set for incoming media requests, ways of answering media investigations, rules for personal interviews, television talks, etc. There should be rules for receiving and handling incoming media requests (persons handling calls and other press requests; their roles; employees' responsibilities regarding the press; who has the right to speak to the media, if asked etc.)

The plan should also lay down rules for all types of media contact – interviews, press conferences, studio talks.

The location and necessary equipment for a Media Centre should be part of this plan. It is important that the Media Centre in a crisis situation should be of easy access to journalists, though it should be far enough from the Crisis Team's meeting room to guarantee confidentiality for the Team.

Regarding all media relations, one should bear it in mind that all media should be treated equally – what you give to one should be given to all!

Do not change rules for handling the media in a crisis situation unless really necessary; if there is a safety hazard that forces you to change such rules – safety clothes for journalists, escorting them with safeguards etc. – always be the first to explain to them, otherwise they will get the impression you are hiding something.

The media effect of a crisis situation is always an important part of crisis communication. Analyse all media appearances in relation to the crisis, point out your weaknesses in communications, and rectify them immediately if possible.

Prepared Statements

The most important activity in a crisis communication is to be first to communicate. If you do not communicate fast, you will lose the opportunity to control events. Right after the crisis breaks out, you should be the first to talk to the press. Your first press release or statement should include a minimum of: who, what, when and where as related to the situation (a holding statement).

It is advisable to compose prepared statements for all crisis situations so that these are at hand if a crisis breaks out.

Some recommendations for the structure and wording of the press release:

- Stick to the facts, ones gathered form reliable sources
- Do not speculate
- Show concern and goodwill to your public and your employees
- Be short and concise
- Do not use technical terms; if you cannot avoid them, explain them
- Provide deadlines for the next communication activities for the press (press release, press conference or briefing); this will give you some time to prepare more

Possible wording of a holding statement:

A… happened at……. involving…………..It occurred today at… .The incident is under investigation and more information is forthcoming. There will be a press conference at….with more details about the incident.

Post-Crisis Analysis

When the crisis is over, a post-crisis analysis should be done; and when the crisis is over, always analyze your crisis management - what worked and what did not? Record these and re-build your Crisis Communication Plan according to these findings for better crisis management in the future.

Appendix: Contact Lists

The Crisis Communication Plan has to contain all the possible exterior and interior contact lists of the municipality. These lists are also necessary in the municipality's daily operations but are unavoidable as regards being used in a crisis situation if one wishes to reach targets swiftly.

Media Lists

Regardless of crisis, all organizations need an updated media list to be able to handle daily issues, too. The municipality's media list should contain the following contact information:

Local and Regional Media

- Local/regional correspondents/reporters of national press agencies, national papers, state and commercial television, radio stations
- Local media contacts – print, online, television, radio – editorials' central e-mail, telephone number, address, journalists' and editors' contact info.
- Regional media contacts – contact info. regarding all media in surrounding counties/areas

National Media

- National press agencies
- National daily/weekly papers
- Newsreels of national television

- National radio stations
- Biggest online news portals

Trade Media

- Contact information for all trade media (print, electronic, online) the municipality deals with (business, taxation, health, education, transportation, EU issues, public administration etc.)

Interior/Exterior Relations List

- Local/national public authorities – local elected officials, police, fire department, rescue centers, justice system etc.
- Service providers – catering, transportation, PR agency, translation agency, advertising agency telephone service, electric/gas providers etc.
- Other subcontractors
- Independent municipality advisors
- Professional trade organizations
- Experts in different fields
- Regional/national NGOs
- Business contacts – local firms, enterprises, trade associations
- Think tanks, other opinion-leaders
- etc.

Crisis Team Contact List

- Head of CT, Deputy Head
- Crisis Team members
- CT service providers (catering, translation, transportation etc)
- List of spokespersons/communication leaders of CT members' organizations

Crisis Management – Basic Rules and Procedures if a Crisis Hits

Fundamental Principles in Crisis Situations

- Protecting human health and safety
- Protect the environment

- Protect one's image/brand
- Record all facts (logbook)
- Manage confidentiality
- Approve all communications
- Manage the situation from the very start
- Smoothly coordinate those involved
- Warn people who need to be warned
- Watch and listen carefully

Immediate Steps to be Taken When a Crisis Hits

- Take all necessary protective measures, or ensure that they have been taken.
- Notify the Crisis Team according to established procedure
- Plan internal communication procedures
- Organize the first Crisis Team meeting immediately
- Invite experts and other professionals to the CT meeting if necessary
- Prepare agenda and communication facts, to discuss with the Crisis Team
- Collect all available information about the crisis (facts, experts analysis etc.)
- Appoint a secretariat in charge of filtering questions from the media/press and sensitive contacts, and provide that person with a "hold" message.
- Review call transfer guidelines with receptionists and guards, and explain where to transfer calls from the media/press and sensitive contacts
- Get operational telephone lines to manage incoming calls if necessary
- Inform the media (short press release about what/when/where something happened and measures to be taken)
- Monitor the press, collect media appearances
- Update all contact lists, make new lists if necessary
- Collect all organizational background information (general facts' sheet, brochures, leaflets, publications), to be provided later to the media

Tasks for the first Crisis Team Meeting

- Disclose confidentiality principles and the role of the crisis team
- Discussion of the crisis situation – background, reasons for crisis, steps already taken, steps to be taken later, targets, situation analysis
- The crisis team works out the possible scenarios – including the worst-case one – and defines roles
- The crisis team defines the basic message(s) of the situation

- The team decides on interior and exterior communication steps
- Exterior communication
- Approving the listing of exterior relations, including the media
- Defining the task list with responsible persons
- The Head of the Crisis Team shall decide the next team meeting time

The Task of Succeding Crisis Team Meetings

- Update all new information
- Check progress on current tasks
- Update messages and targets if necessary
- Update internal and external communication, including media
- Make new decisions with responsible persons and deadlines
- State the date and time of the next meeting
- Update instructions to employees if necessary

EXAMPLE

Governmental Crisis Team for national and state holidays

A terrible storm with 120-130 km/hour winds hit the 20 August state celebrations in 2006, killing 5 people and injuring 500 other onlookers from a crowd of 1.5 million at the biggest event of the year, the ceremonial fireworks on the banks of the Danube in Budapest. The disaster shocked everyone, so the government decided to review all laws, rules and regulations regarding safety in relation to national holidays, and it introduced strict regulations for upcoming public events. A state Crisis Team was first set up, being responsible for the avoidance of all possible risks relating to state holidays, for working out Crisis Plans and Crisis Communication Plans, and putting on and administering public events with all possible safety measures.

20 August 2007

The government appointed the state secretary of the Prime Minister's Office the Head of Crisis Team, being responsible for all activities of the team for the 20 August 2007 state celebrations. He was the one who had to decide on all safety measures after consulting with members of the Crisis Team, and could delay or cancel events if necessary. The Crisis Team consisted of *organizers and professionals in charge of event organizing and safety (heads of the national weather forecast, ambulance, police, fire brigade, disaster management, National Guard, public transportation, event organizers, etc.),*

The Crisis Team was set up a month before an event, to start making all the necessary plans for safety: ambulance, public transport, weather forecast, communications etc.). All planned programmes had to be accepted by the team from a safety point of view. The Crisis Team also introduced new safety measures to make celebrations safer e.g.: checking the roof tiles of houses, checking trees standing by the Danube, putting restrictions on unsafe small boats on the Danube, outlining safety conditions for ships etc.

All communication was synchronized with team members and decisions were made on the basis of all information collected from professionals.

Besides safety measures, new communication channels had to be introduced to be able to provide information to crowds of people if needed. Safety leaflets were produced and handed out, huge displays and loudspeakers were put up on Danube banks, the press was continually informed about safety preparations and new measures. One of the problems that the organizers had to face in 2006 was that they could not communicate with crowds - people panicked, tried to run away, pushing others, causing serious injuries, and they had no idea where to go and seek shelter.

A weather forecast station was set up in the office of the Crisis Team so that team members could be informed first-hand about any weather changes.

The national fireworks started at 9 p.m., but there were several other programmes on banks of the Danube all day; a huge crowd of about 800 000 - 1 000 000 people were watching the air race when the Crisis Team received information, in the early afternoon, that a storm similar to the previous year's storm was approaching Budapest. As all had communication channels and since all Crisis Team members had walkie-talkies (so they could be reached at all times), the Head of the Team first cancelled a water program that was about to start on the Danube. At the same time, people were informed via visual displays and loudspeakers about the storm and were asked to leave the Danube bank. We had about 1.5 hours to clear the banks before the storm hit. We used all communication tools, and informed the media. By the time the storm arrived - with 132 km/hour winds – there was no-one outside, all visitors had sought shelter in the underground or at hotels and other public buildings (whose administrators had been asked beforehand by the Crisis

Team to let people in should there be danger). No-one was hurt and by the time the fireworks started people were able to come back and watch the display in safety. So the governmental Crisis Team prevented all possible dangers – and the state holiday was safe.

Basic Communication Principles in a Crisis Situation

- TELL IT ALL, TELL IT FAST AND TELL THE TRUTH
- DO NOT LIE, DO NOT TRY TO DENY YOUR INVOLVEMENT
- IF YOU IGNORE THE SITUATION, IT WILL GET WORSE
- DO NOT IGNORE THE MEDIA, THEY WON'T GO AWAY

It is always the best to admit your responsibility in a crisis – and do everything possible to deal with the situation. This will do less harm than denying it. The truth will always be disclosed sooner or later.

If your target audiences feel that you are being honest, show empathy, goodwill and sorrow for those who may have suffered any kind of harm in a crisis, and if you take responsibility in heading the rescue procedure, persons will more likely to forgive you your mistakes. A corporate attitude like this will perhaps strengthen your image, too, after a crisis... Organizations that acted like this were able to handle a crisis situation much better than ones who did not.

On the contrary, an organization that takes no responsibility and does not tell the truth is ignoring the target audience's interests and feelings – and it will destroy its image over the long term, if not forever!

Basic Rules for Handling the Press (interviews, press briefings, studio talks)

- Do not forget that an interview or a studio talk is a chance for your organization to convey its message and to build up its image
- Be aware of what you wish to say – repeat your main messages 2-3 times during the interview
- Stick to the subject
- Stand straight and keep eye-contact with your audience
- Talk slowly, loudly and clearly
- Keep to your time limit
- Answer all questions in a friendly way, calmly and confidently
- Never be defensive or emotional

- Do not lose your head!
- Do not try to answer any questions that were not asked
- Admit if you do not know the answer – answer them later
- Do not let a journalist dominate questions – move on
- Be prepared; rehearse using the worst questions
- If you do not understand a question, ask for it again
- Do not argue with a journalist
- Talk in clear, short sentences, avoiding professional terms
- Do not forget: NO COMMENT means you are hiding something or you are guilty of something

After the Crisis

Learn from your experiences when the crisis is over. Analyse what worked and what did not in your Crisis Communication Plan. Revise your plan based on your experiences – and change necessary elements.

Do not forget that there should always be post-crisis communication as well. Keep on informing your interior and exterior targets of the details of steps taken after the crisis, changes you have introduced to avoid more such crisis situations, and inform persons about recovery processes.

Behave like a responsible, reliable organization. Keep building and strengthening your image after the crisis, show concern and goodwill in helping persons affected by the crisis, and lead/motivate the local community to act together for the place where they live.

Bear in mind that the key element within successful corporate communication and crisis management is **your attitude towards your community.**

References

Most of the examples in the article were taken from my own professional experience. I have spent 14 years at international communication agencies and multinational firms as a leading PR advisor, and more than 3 years as a governmental PR director, responsible for state communication campaigns and events. I have planned and implemented Crisis Communication Plans for several Hungarian and international firms and was a Crisis Team member responsible for communication on many occasions. Working for the government, I was a member of the Governmental Crisis Team for state holidays, responsible for communication and events.

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Izabella Simon

LOCAL BY SOCIAL?
Old and New Media in the Communication of Municipalities

Introduction

What do municipalities have the capacity for today? This might be the question summarising the widespread research areas of the TÁMOP sub-project entitled *The Capacity of the State - Experts, Officials, Politicians*. During the research done in the workshop[1], which examined the communications of local municipalities, we were looking for answers to the following questions: What characterises the communications of municipalities? What capacities or lack of capacities do towns have? How much are they are capable of taking advantage of opportunities offered by the Internet and digital applications? In addition to answering these questions, we make an effort to present 'good practice' via the examples of Cegléd, Vác and Biatorbágy, which prove to be promising in terms of developing more interactive local communication.

In the first chapter of the study we determine the theoretical and methodological framework in which we interpret the research; in the second chapter we explore who communicates what and through what channels in connection with the three chosen municipalities, what the relationship between the municipalities and local media is like and how the municipality takes advantage of opportunities offered by new media tools. In the third part we briefly present the exemplary good practices collected during the research. Finally, we shall summarise the results of the research.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The research giving the basis of the present study constitutes one part of a greater project, which aims to explore the local capacity of the state in the Central Hungary Region, paying special attention to the opinions and attitudes of municipality elite members (mayors, town clerks and councillors). The research was conducted in two stages. In the first phase we did questionnaire-based data collection[2] with settlement mayors, town clerks and councillors[3]; but as our topic was to be addressed through the experiences of mayors and the press officers, further 'deep-boring' seemed to be necessary – thus, data for questionnaires was extended by interviews made with mayors and the press officers. We chose the three settlements for our case study (after careful examination of possibilities); excluding Budapest and cities with a county authority, we were seeking out settlements that may be seen as *typical* – mainly in terms of media supply and consumption – so we chose Cegléd, Vác and Biatorbágy from medium-sized towns with populations of 10.000 or above, while also taking regional dimension into account. Even though due to the above we cannot draw general consequences associated with the country as a whole, and even if the communication practices of the three settlements do show tendentious similarities and deficiencies, our experiences may well provide a good starting point for later research to be conducted with a larger sample.

Political and Media Environment

A researcher who wants to discuss politics and media and how they interrelate is able to choose from a huge amount of professional literature. The present study does not allow for reflection upon all this, though it does seem practical to briefly look over relevant statements coming from persons working in political science, for observing political communication and relating to local publicity operations, as well as from communication science, and persons exploring – within a theoretical framework – the almost daily-changing late-modern media environment. In the publicity dialogue model of political communication established by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), political communication can be described as a triangle, in which the system of politics, media and citizens form the vertices of the triangle – their forms of communication with each other represents political communication itself (Mazzoleni, 2002). Others provide stricter, or more definite definitions, i.e. in the multi-layer communication network of people's lives, where communication aiming at maintaining or obtaining power might be termed political communication (Karácsony, 2000). The survey of communication in relation to local municipalities is comprehensive if we examine the interactions of politics, citizens and the media. The present research, though, examined especially political communication (i.e. of politicians) and communication organising and checking activities of municipalities – since municipalities communications may be seen as a political-administrative act. It cannot be ignored that the system of municipalities – which has existed for barely twenty years – is still learning publicity in the sense of Habermas, i.e. transparency and the sharing of information; while it is struggling not only with financial but also legitimacy – mainly participation – problems in a constantly changing political-economic-social environment (Marelyn Kiss-Kabai-Dénes, 2001). Meanwhile, the development begun in the field of digital technologies is something almost unfollowable for organisations, as a result of which in the late-modern media environment neither media channels nor established concepts describing the media and communication can be used in the 'usual' way. "Our world ... is characterised by an interconnected, complex and hybrid network of media, which works as a sort of storage of experiences in interrelation with the social and cultural environment" (Myat, 2010), where the media-user, constructing meaning and identity, is its key player, who at the same time also shapes, forms and edits this media space with his/her own content. The contextual borders of traditional media with social media are now narrow, so political communication is redundant, being often limited to repetition. It comes complete with on-line content; though it does find new challengers, since not only politicians but citizens also take over certain media tasks appearing in the on-line space (Merkovity, 2009b). The world (set) of politics additionally adapts to the changing media environment, trying not only to thematize but also control discourses in the social media. The question is whether the same can be said of political and media space at local levels. How do politicians see this change - and what characterises local media and local communications?

Communication Practices of Municipalities

The organisation and operations of communication is a function of very public use (Bakó, 2011), which can greatly contribute to the success of the municipality and the development of the local community and may provide a break-out point for economic, political and the civil spheres. This is a form of general work, the aim of which – in addition to participation and feedback – is producing profit and creating value. Communication activity affects investments and development, and from encouraging the responsibility of the local community the result is increasing living standards and the idea that residents who are "well supplied" with information will stay in the area. The minimum publicity required by law and the minimum amount of information for residents is presently fulfilled by settlement municipalities, according to opportunity. Yet an optimal flow of information, developing adequate info-communication systems and using e-communication tools require a very complex system of conditions, attitude and know-how. The primary requirement for this is to replace instinctive communication activities by conscious, planned and efficient communication. The condition for this is to provide a professional, technical and personal background as well as resources, which, however, points to major borderlines between municipalities – the research actually focused on what capacities and capital municipalities have for the development of local communication in alliance with the tools mentioned above. First, we tried to map the location of municipality communication and where this occurs within the organisation and the local media market.

Communication channels

The three settlements have different local conditions and political "set-up", though the person and legitimacy of the mayor is one of the most important factors in answering the question, for s/he controls and organises the communications of the municipality. How professionalised communication is can primarily be measured on the basis of the level of the organisation, so we also asked if the municipality has any written communication strategies, concepts or if there is a press department. In *Cegléd,* the mayor has strong legitimacy and communication procedures, and town marketing and town development are organised in a separate mayor's cabinet; the press officer is a member of this cabinet, being employed by the mayor. *Biatorbágy* does not have a separate team, though the mayor does control the communications of the municipality and there is an employed press officer doing operations work. The situation is different in *Vác*: the mayor's political majority is not stable, which is perhaps why the town council "outsourced" municipality media from the authority of the mayor to a separate company – thus, Városimázs Kft. manages the municipality's communications. The company's manager is the press officer of the municipality, and his mandate is provided by the town council.

Examining municipality media, we can say that municipalities only lack radio stations – they are provided with all other channels. There is no cable TV in *Biatorbágy,* yet they have overcome the lack of such as they have content that is accessible on the Internet (which shall be discussed in detail in the chapter presenting good practices). Regarding the new web2.0 media, we only presented Facebook, since this was the only social medium known or mentioned by respondents in the interviews.

Table 1.: Municipality media in the three settlements

The municipality has:	Biatorbágy	Cegléd	Vác
Written communication strategy and concept	No	No	No
Press office	No	No	No
Journal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cable TV	No*	Yes	Yes
Radio	No	No	No
Website	Yes	Yes	Yes
Facebook profile	Yes	Yes	Yes
Responsible for press issues	Press officer	Press officer	Városimázs Kft.

It is practical to consider the wider local media market, partly to see what competitors the given municipalities have to take into account and partly to be able to reflect on the local communication noise and the local communication network. Fig. 2. shows what other media are accessible to persons in these settlements, in addition to the municipalities official channels. It can be seen that each municipality medium has both on-line and off-line competitors. We think it is important to emphasise this, as the majority of printed papers are mostly either left-wing newspapers from the previous political cycle, or commercial ones, the vast majority of which are advertising papers. In *Cegléd,* the number of websites dealing with local news seems to be high even with this consideration – as in *Biatorbágy*, where the number of Facebook profiles using the name of the town is high. In the former case, the high figure is less of a problem if operators are able to maintain so many websites, though in the latter case it may be a problem, i.e. in that one cannot decide which Facebook profile is the official one.

Table 2.: Local media market

Major media in the settlements	**Biatorbágy**	**Cegléd**	**Vác**
Paper	2	4	2
Radio	0	1	0
Cable TV	1	1	1
Website	2	4	2*
Facebook profile	5*	1	2**

* regional TV

** one cannot decide which is the “official” profile of the municipality

Efficient communication channels

In the unanimous opinion of our mayors, the most efficient form of communication is personal contact with the mayor, since residents mostly wish to see the mayor if they want to deal with day-to-day affairs. After personal contact, persons listed the municipality journal and the website as the follow-up most popular channels. Their own media preferences are the same – as shown on the graph below – together with the responses of councillors.

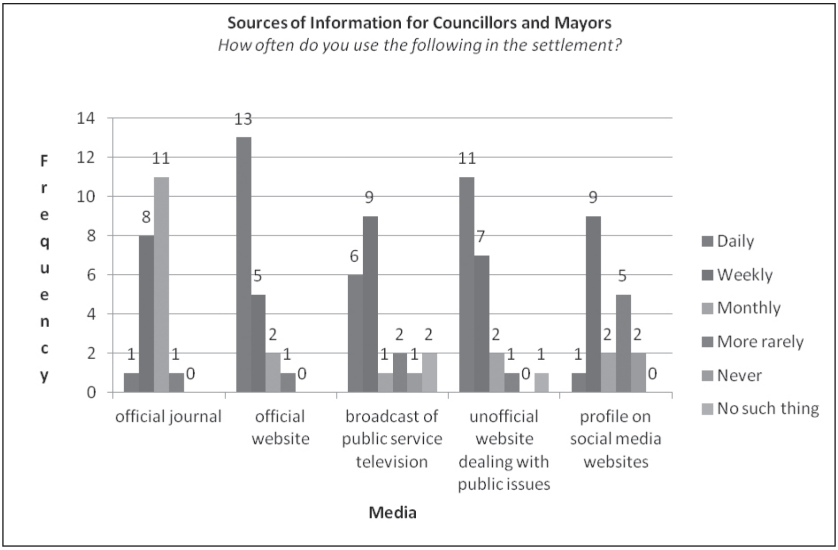

Figure 1.: Sources of information regarding mayors and councillors

The printed press and the website of a municipality are well on the top of the list of reading/visits[4] though an unofficial website for the settlement, one dealing with public issues, is often visited by councillors and mayors. This is also due to the fact that the official websites of settlements only present news on official and public events in the main. Press officers – also with the position of editor-journalist – take special care of content, which is free of party politics. In addition, unofficial local media (newspaper or website) publish material with a political content (mostly from the opposition). Talking about the websites of the town, it should be mentioned that they remind for the 1.0 times not only in their design but also ergonomically. There is no opportunity for immediate message sharing, uploading pictures or videos, or for sharing content – chiefly due to programming limits and the poor capacity of servers.

Since only *Facebook* was mentioned by councillors and mayors in terms of social media, we shall look at this single area within social media. Attendance numbers had on Facebook profiles are a little extreme in spite of persons making only weekly visits since the responses of our three mayors show that even if they knew that the town had such a registration on the largest social website, they have either never seen it or never used it for any purpose. None of them has a personal profile. Among the mayors' future plans regarding the development of local communication, town marketing gas the highest priority in *Cegléd*, mainly as regards creating jobs; while in *Vác,* renewing the content and form of the local journal and, in *Biatorbágy,* compiling a communication concept are among held plans. Press officers, who also do editing and journalistic tasks, would strengthen the municipality in on-line presence, not only through the development and optimisation of websites but also in setting up a "Facebook team".

Figure 2.

We do not have data for what communication channels the residents of the three settlements prefer - yet the result of the vote on cegledinfo.hu may be worth comparing with the above. Close to half of respondents marked the Internet as a response to the question: *From what type of local medium do you get informed about events in Cegléd?* As the voting was accessible in an on-line environment, obviously many more people voted from among safe and frequent users of the Internet, though apart from this distortion it seems worth paying more attention to on-line content for municipalities.

Vote

From what type of **local** media do you get informed about events in Cegléd?
Total: 319 votes
TV: 41
Radio: 39
Newspapers: 88
Internet: 151

Facebook Profiles of Municipalities

Examining the Facebook profiles of the towns, it can be said that their applications are not 'mature', i.e. they do not really know what it is for or how they could make use of this, the largest social media website. The profiles are "faceless", one does not know who is behind the registration, which fact might be rather misleading for the user - and in the long run this might lead to a deterioration of the prestige and reliability of the municipality's functioning. With *Biatorbágy* it is especially disturbing that five profiles can be found with the name of the town, and a user cannot decide which is the official one. The number of likes/friends is very high with all profiles that can be considered 'official'; we found ones with 4.000-5.000 friends, even though communication is occasional and mostly one-sided: there is no interactivity, or discourse between the sender and message recipients. It can be stated that the Facebook profiles of towns are more like extended arms or megaphones for municipality websites; and communication is no more than sharing news and events presented on the towns' websites. Due to all of this, such a communication channel is more of a virtual notice board than an interactive agora.

Good Practices of Municipalities

Of course there are examples of practices working well. In *Cegléd*, it is good practice that after town council meetings, a local television interviewer discusses the topics covered at the meeting with the mayor and the councillors, in a programme called *Hour of Questions*. It is also a good initiative that anyone can open a topic on the *Forum* of the town's website. A similarly good initiative is that the mayor may be asked questions directly through the website of the town on the *Mayor Answers* interface. It is interesting how the two websites, the official one called cegled.hu and the news site called *ceglednifo.hu,* "collaborate". Interestingly, both websites are edited and upgraded by the press officer. Why is this necessary? Hungarian political public life gives a reason for the operating of two websites at the same time because while the official website of the town is free of political content, debate and comments, anyone can share their opinions with the public on cegledfinfo.hu, so everyone is happy.

In *Biatorbágy* persons believe in the power of forums for residents; the mayor explains that many people visit the forums on debated issues, which may also be due to the fact that he "personally" invites there residents who have land-line phones by *automatic call*. It does not cost much and it is effective. Another issue is how many people who still have a land-line telephone in the settlement can be prompted like this. The municipality has dealt with the tension between the pleasant and the useful, i.e. a magazine-like content and compulsory content: they have in circulation *two publications.* They have experienced that in the era of tabloids it is worthless overloading the municipality's journal with dry, legal regulations because few understand them or can follow them. Thus they decided to leave the municipality journal as a magazine-like, colourful paper, one with pictures in, in which the detailed legal regulations are issued too though in a more consumable form; while orders and decrees are published separately - monthly, or biannually, depending on how productive the town council has been - and these are then located in several points in the town (customer service locations, post offices, doctor's offices) so that all legal material is available, free, to those who are interested.

A very simple, but great idea, one principally helping the work of office workers, is that the work schedule of town leaders and major clerks is made visible via an Intranet application using *Google calendar.* This way, anyone in the office can see when the mayor is out of office, for example, or when he has a guest.

The best practice, however, is obviously in relation to the town council meeting, where this is accessible and downloadable via the Internet, and which can be seen on the website of the *Municipality TV.* The use of digital technology can be best presented perhaps in this example, since it is so innovative - here, the municipality does not need to deal with having its own cable TV channel or a separate crew. The on-line, live broadcast is not only good for residents but also for workers in the office, for if anyone has to be present from the office at any item on the agenda, e.g. as a presenter, then they do not have to sit in the meeting for hours on end awaiting their turn – they merely watch the on-line programme, and leave their office when the relevant item on the agenda is to come up. As the recording can be archived and cut, it can be labelled according to agenda items – or even on the basis of the names of comment-makers; so archive recordings are easy to handle later. Thus, if one does not want to see the town council meeting from beginning to end, it is enough just to click on topic of interest, an item on the agenda or comment-maker - and the recording starts from there. The technical conditions for commissioning the system was to install cameras in the town council meeting room that are connected to the microphones, so if a councillor requests leave to speak, the camera automatically zooms in on them. Not only video recordings can be uploaded and are accessible to visitors – written minutes are, too, for which searches can be done by entering a 'key word'. Video recordings are available for two years on the onkormanyzati.tv site, which allows persons to easily search for the serious content. The system is able to send invitations to registered users with the date and time of the next meeting that may be of interest to them, or to indicate whether new content has been uploaded. Really experimenting municipalities may involve residents in voting for proposals, i.e. in decision-making. In addition, it is also worth using the system with regard to electors, because it is interactive: people can vote, express their opinions on what discussions they liked, and what they did not like; they can share interesting recordings on Facebook - and using the system is free for private people.

In *Vác* it is good practice that municipality media are not controlled by the mayor but by a separate *non-profit* company, one responsible to the town council. Perhaps this is the reason for the institution of *mayor's press conferences,* which are organised by the mayor after town council meetings or in relation to debated issues. The non-stop available *free service phone number* is also an example of good practice.

Summary

Going back to this research project's starting question, it can be stated that at the level of municipalities – here based on three settlements – municipalities mostly use printed newspapers among the traditional communication channels, in addition to which, however, the town website has started to become an authentic source of information. Local communication is mostly controlled by the mayor, somebody employing one person: the press officer. The most obvious capacity-related problems also arise from this: one person is doing the job of classic press officer as well as that of editor (newspaper, website), journalist and media technician in each settlement. Thus, press workers have hardly any time for social media activities that might address younger target groups, too. One can say that municipalities do not take advantage of the opportunities provided by digital applications or Internet for either communication or strengthening ties with the living environment, or as regards the political involvement of electors – they are still looking for their place and opportunities in the late-modern, hybrid media space. This may also happen because informing electors in not top priority in 2011 for municipalities who are struggling with financial problems and where there is a lack of human and financial resources.

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Notes

1 The present study was undertaken within the sub-project entitled *Efficient State, Expert Administration, Regional Developments for Competitive Society* of the TÁMOP program No: 4.2.1/B-09/1/KMR-2010-0005. at the Corvinus University of Budapest, in a workshop examining the communications of municipalities: *The Capacity of the State – Experts, Officials, Politicians.* Leader of the workshop: Gabriella Ilonszki; leader of the media research group: Ágnes Jenei. Peer-reviewed by: Ágnes Jenei, University associate professor (CUB); Izabella Simon, PhD student at Corvinus University of Budapest, School of Political Sciences

2 Thanks to: Zsófia Papp, Réka Várnagy, Gábor Dobos, András Kell, Dániel Oross for preparation, polling, and extremely careful documentation of questionnaires.

3 Due to the poor capacities of the research we did not have a chance to interview all councillors (40), so we chose potential interviewees according to different factors. We did not aim to be representative in terms of party affiliation, as we could thus have questioned only a small proportion of the frittered opposition. Fieldwork lasted from the beginning of May 2011 till the end of August; 4 councillors from Biatorbágy, 8 from Cegléd and 6 from Vác were interviewed; and in-depth interviews were done with 3 mayors and 3 press officers.

4 Local magazines are usually published monthly, except for in the municipality journal in Cegléd, which is always published at the beginning of the second week following meetings of the town council.

5 In the latest application of the National Association of Municipalities of Settlements, municipalities implementing the best communication practices were searched for and awarded. The most successful application was the practice of the 13th District of Budapest, which was entitled “Renovation of the public space in Országbíró Street housing estate and walkway; active involvement of residents, using innovative communication and community design methodology” – to which the upgraded, user-friendly website of the district also greatly contributed.

Csilla Herendy

HOW TO DO RESEARCH ON PEOPLE'S ATTENTION AND ORIENTATION AT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION WEBSITES[1]
Eye tracking as a usability inspection method

Introduction

In this study, three Hungarian self-government portals – cegled.hu, vac.hu, biatorbagy.hu – were researched with the use of two different methods, one being the eye-tracking research method, tasks for which are based on a very simple usability testing method; and the results of the eye tracking research are completed with a usability analysis. The methodology of the usability analysis is based on Krug's "Trunk test". (Krug, 2006, pp. 85.)

The aims of this study were to investigate and assess the usability of the main pages of the sites and one subpage of each site. The ease – or difficulty – of finding different pieces of information on the site was tested, and users' evaluations of the site as being either simple or too complicated were investigated. The survey focused on another question as well: how easy it is to understand the site's navigation system.

The importance of testing websites and using different testing methods for websites is highlighted by various studies undertaken, such as Don't make me think! (Krug, 2006), Usability Inspection Methods (Nielsen and Mack, 1995 et al.) and the F-Shaped Pattern for Reading Web Content (Nielsen, 2006). One of the most promising modern tools is eye-tracking, as discussed by, for instance, Nielsen (2006) and Duchowski (2007). These studies concentrate on the eye-movements of the user: how they look at web pages, what they read, what they don't read, what they will tend to – or will never – see, etc.

Using the eye-tracking method, the aim of this survey is to reveal how users find specific information on sites and see whether the sites meet general needs and expectations, that is, the "general online thinking" of users.

In addition to the eye-tracking method, a defined usability research method online focus was also used.

In general, using different usability techniques can help us to understand user's behaviour; also, to put such persons' needs and frustrations in context, and assess the performance of the current site (Unger – Chander, 2009). In this research, a special testing method was used, one based or Steve Krug's test – the "Trunk test".

The present survey might help us to get to understand how users feel about self-government websites, especially about the Cegléd, Vác and Biatorbágy websites. The eye-tracking method enables one to understand which pieces of information are positioned optimally – and which are not; while the usability test helps us gain an understanding of the reasons for obtained results.

Method

In this study, three Hungarian self-government portals – cegled.hu, vac.hu, biatorbagy.hu – (see Figures 1-3) were studied via the use of two different testing methods: eye-tracking research and a defined usability test.

Figure 1: Print Screen of the site: Cegled.hu

Figure 2: Print Screen of the site: Vac.hu

Figure 3: Print Screen of the site: Biatorbagy.hu

First, I shall write about the eye tracking research process.

About the eye tracking research and methodology

For the research work, the eye tracker of Atreo Cognitive Research Institute was used[2].

This allows one to obtain a very accurate analysis of the behaviour of users. The gadget is non-obtrusive, which means that there is no need to place it on the head of the user. Eye tracking is the process of measuring either the focus point of someone's gaze („where we are looking") or the motion of the pupil relative to the head. An eye tracker is thus a device for measuring eye positions and eye movements.

Eye trackers are used in research studying visual surfaces, in psychology, in website-usability or in product design; and there are a number of methods by which one might measure eye movements.

Atreo's video-based eye tracker works on the following operating principle: two cameras, which are placed on a monitor, focus on both eyes of a person and record their movement as the viewer looks at some kind of stimulus. The "Remote Eye tracking System" makes use of the contrast between the iris and pupil. The system uses infrared and near-infrared, non-collimated light to create data from the corneal reflection. The vector of these two features can be used to compute gaze intersection with a surface after a simple calibration has been made for an individual.

Using the data, the system can then create different overview maps related to eye movements[3]. Using this map, it can be clearly established how users survey the visual surface, and can tell which parts of the surface are more – and which are less – interesting for the user (Bodor, Illés and Síklaki, et al.)

The "Scanpath analysis" shows the sequence of fixations and their exact time duration. About saccades and fixations, one can say that while drawing one's visual information, eye-movements are in the main neither smooth nor regular. Indeed, while looking at a visual surface, one gets the impression that one's eyes are moving smoothly across the page – yet that is not what is actually happening!

There are different eye-movements of interest for the present survey – and two types of eye-movement are important for us when using the eye tracking research method: one is the saccade, i.e. rapid eye movements used in repositioning the fovea to a new location in the visual environment; the other one is the fixations – eye movements that stabilize the retina over a stationary object of interest for about 250 milli-seconds. (Duchowski, 2007, pp. 51-52.)

During the saccade phase, one can't see anything – we're essentially blind; the movements are so rapid that one doesn't even realize they're happening. Our eyes are looking for what is ahead during most of the saccades, yet they do look backwards, too, for 10 to 15 percent of the time, i.e. rereading letters and words." Such eye movement is recordable during eye tracking surveys. (Weinschenk, 2011 pp. 30.)

The "Attention level" and the "Hotspot" maps show the length of fixations and the degree of visual attention. These maps depict in a very clear, graphic way how users (part of the experimental group) surveyed the visual surface; and it can be particularly interesting when users are looking at websites.

I have supplemented the results gained from eye tracking research with an analysis, one based on Krug's Trunk test – and one of the tasks of eye tracking research was also based on this test.

About the importance of navigation and website usability

If users go to a site and can't find what they are looking for or figure out how the site is organized, they are not likely to stay there long – or to return! Krug opines that net users and those on IRL (in real life) in many ways go through the same processes when they enter a shop – i.e. as they do when surveying the content of a Website. (Krug, 2006 et.al)

- We're usually trying to find something. In the "real" world it might be the emergency room or a can of baked beans; on the Web, it might be the cheapest 4-head VCR with Commercial Advance or the name of the actor in Casablanca who played the headwaiter at Rick's. ("See Search and You May Find" in NIelsen's archive of this Alertbox columns on www.useit.com)
- We decide whether to ask first or browse first. The difference is that on a Website there's no-one standing around who can tell you where things are. The Web equivalent of asking directions is searching – that is, typing a description of what you're looking for in a search box and getting back a list of links to places where it might be. (Krug, 2006 pp. 54.)

Some people (Jakob Nielsen terms them "search-dominant" users) will almost always look at a search box as soon as they enter a site. (These may be the same people who look for the nearest sales assistant upon entering a store.)

Other people (Nielsen's "link-dominant" users) will almost always browse first, searching only when they've run out of likely links to click on, or when they have gotten sufficiently frustrated by the site. (Krug, 2008 pp. 54.)

For anyone else, a decision about whether to start by browsing or searching depends on:

- their current frame of mind,
- how much of a hurry they're in,
- and whether the site appears to have decently browsable navigation.

To navigate at the site and make their own way through a hierarchy, visual signs help users. If they cannot find what they are looking for, they will soon leave it. Thus, as Krug argues, looking for things on a Website and looking for them IRL have a lot in common. When we're exploring the Web, in some ways it feels like we're moving around in a physical space. Think of the words we use to describe the experience – "cruising," "browsing," and "surfing"; and clicking a link doesn't "load" or "display" another page – it "takes you to" a page.

It also explains why the concept of Home pages is so important. Home pages are – comparatively – fixed places. When you're in a site, the Home page is like the North Star. Being able to click "Home" gives you a fresh start.

The functions of the navigation are the following:

- It tells the user what's there. The navigation can tell us what the site contains. Navigation reveals content.
- It tells us how to use the site. If the navigation is doing its job, it tells us implicitly where to begin and what your options are.
- It gives to users confidence in the people who built it. Clear, well-thought-out navigation is one of the best opportunities for a site in creating a good impression.

Krug says that the navigation system on the web and navigation around physical spaces – cities, buildings etc. – both have their own way of navigation. The conventions (loosely) specify the appearance and location of the navigation elements, so users know what to look for – and where to look when they need them. Putting them in a standard place allows users to locate them quickly, with a minimum of effort; while standardizing their appearance makes it easy to distinguish them from everything else. (Krug, 2008 pp. 60.)

So it is quite frustrating when some of these navigation conventions are broken.

Why is this so important? Because when users scan screens, the way of scanning is based on past experience and expectations.

The basic questions are the following: Where do people look first on a computer screen? Where do they look next? It depends partially on what they're doing and expecting...

If persons read in a language that moves from left to right, they will tend to look at the screen from left to right; if they read from right to the left, it is the opposite. However, users don't start scanning from the topmost corner, because people have gotten used to the idea that there are things on computer screens that are less relevant to the task at hand, such as logos, blank spaces, and navigation bars; thus they will look at the centre of the screen and avoid the edges. Usually, after a first glance at a screen, people move in their culture's normal reading pattern (left to right, right to left, top to bottom). Yet if something grabs their attention, for example, a large, colourful photo (especially one of someone's face) or movement (an animated banner or video) somewhere else on the screen, we can easily pull them away from this normal tendency. (Weinschenk, 2011 pp. 13-14.)

This is because users have a mental model of what they want to see and, moreover, where they want to see it. People have a mental model of where things are likely to be on a computer screen, and a mental model relating to particular applications or Websites that they use. So they have a tendency to look at a screen based on these mental models.

The basic elements of navigation conventions are the following:

"You are here" indicators: shows the users place in the navigation system

Persistent navigation includes five elements on the website:

- Site ID
- "Home" – a way home
- "Search" – a way to search
- Sections – Primary navigation
- Utilities (e.g. "how to…) (Krug, 2006 et.al)

We expect to see the site's ID at the top of the page, as we expect the name of a building over its front entrance. This is the most important visual sign: it represents the whole site – it has the highest part in the site's logical hierarchy.

Utilities may include any of following:

About Us
Archives
Company Info
Contact Us
Discussion Boards

Downloads
Directory
Forums
FAQs
Help
Home
Jobs
News
Press Releases
Privacy Policy
Register
Search
Sign in
Site Map
StoreLocator

The sections (primary navigation) are links to the main sections of the site, being the top level of the site's hierarchy; for secondary navigation there is the list of site subsections.

Utilities are links to important elements of the site, and they are not part of the content hierarchy – e.g. "help", "site map", "FAQs", "About us", "Contact us". The Utilities list – Krug states – should be less prominent than the sections.

The most crucial aspect of web navigation is a button or a link that takes you to the site's home page. No matter if the user becomes lost – he/she can always start over, using the "Home" button or link.

The way of searching, as Krug explains, is that every site – unless it is very small and very well organised – should have a search box or a link to a search page. This is because a large percentage of users like to use the search box rather than primary navigation. The search box should have a very simple formula: a box, a button, and the word: "search".

The page name is also basic information for the user: the page name enables one to get to know where one is on a given website. Krug suggests that every page needs a name, and the name needs to be in the right place.

Highlighting one's current location via navigational bars also helps the user. Such signs, visual elements, different colors and bold text, arrows etc. are the "You are here" indicators; and they are very small and subtle cues for the user.

The "Breadcrumbs" show where the user is; it usually includes the words "You are here". Unlike "You are here" indicators that show the user where he/she is in the context of the site's hierarchy, Breadcrumbs only show him/her the path from the Home page to where he or she is. Breadcrumbs are located is the top of the site, and the most evident sign between the pages is the > sign. E.g.: Home > Hobbies > Book Collecting > You are here.

A usability test used on three self-government portals

Krug has developed a very simple and easy test for good web navigation. The task is the following: Imagine that you've been blindfolded and locked in the trunk of a car, then driven around for a while and dumped on a page somewhere deep in the bowels of a Website. If the page is well designed, when your vision clears you should be able to answer these questions without hesitation:

- What site is this? (Site ID)
- What page am I on? (Page name)
- What are the major sections of this site? (Sections)
- What are my options at this level? (Local navigation)
- Where am I in the scheme of things? ("You are here" indicators)
- How can I search?

The reason for the "Goodfellas motif" is that it is so easy to forget that the web experience is often more like being shanghaied than following a garden path. When designers design pages, it is tempting to think that people will reach them by starting at the Home page and will subsequently follow nice, neat paths – which the site's owner have laid out. Yet the reality is that users are often dropped down in the middle of a site and have no idea where they are because they have followed a link from a search engine or from another site, and they've never seen the site's navigation scheme before. This is even truer today than it was five years ago, as for many people everything they do on the Web now begins with a Google search.

And the blindfold? You want your vision to be slightly blurry, for the true test isn't whether you can figure it out given enough time and close scrutiny; the standard needs to be that these elements pop off the page so clearly that it doesn't matter whether you're looking closely or not. You want to be relying solely on the overall appearance of things, not the details. (Krug, 2006 pp. 85-86.)

The way to perform the Trunk test is as follows:
Step 1: Choose a page anywhere on the site at random, and print it.
Step 2: Hold it at arm's length or squint so you can't really study it closely.

Step 3: As quickly as possible, try to find and circle each item in the list below. (You won't find all of the items on every page.)

Try to find on a subpage the following functions/graphic elements:

- Site ID
- Page name
- Sections
- Local navigation
- Search

The research, I've conducted, based on this test.

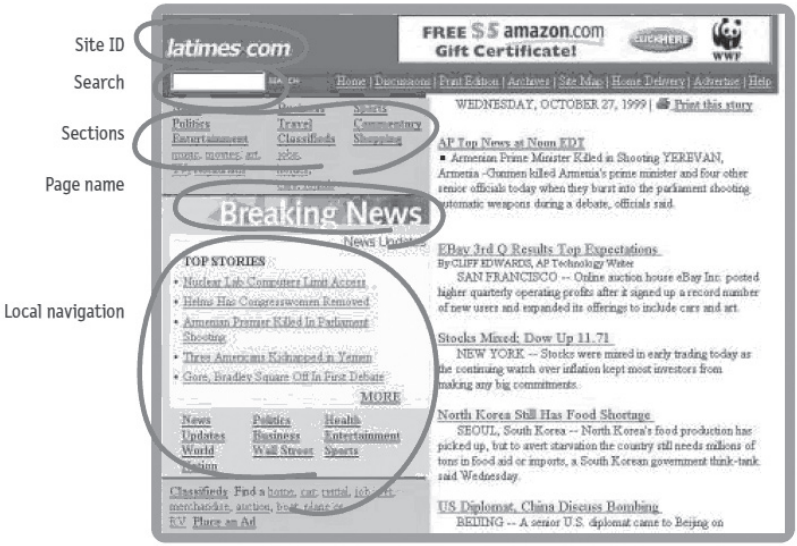

Figure 4: How to perform a Trunk test – by Krug. (Krug: 2006)

1. Site ID, 2. Page name, 3. Sections and subsections, 4. Local navigation, 5. "You are here" indicator(s), 6. Search.

PARTICIPANTS

Five users took part in the research. The average age of the participants was 19-34 years. The participants were 3 women and 2 men, 2 from rural areas of Hungary and 3 from Budapest. Three of the subjects had a secondary-level education; the others had higher education degrees or had had some higher education. They had a wide range of interests, from fishing to history.

Eye tracking and usability Research relating to three self-government portals

Eye tracking research

The research took place at the Eye tracking Laboratory of the Atreo Research Institute. Participants arrived one after the other; they sat down in front of the screen and were told about the essence of the eye tracking technology and the research procedure. The research head was sitting at the same table as the participants.

The research was conducted in one, very simple phase, with three simple tasks:

(1) First, users were shown the print screen of one subpage of each website on a computer screen. The print screens were formulated on October 14th, 2011.
The subpages were sites of the office's financial section.
Research participants did not know this – and they were asked to find out "where they are" on the web, and "where they are" on the specific website. Connecting up with Krug's "Trunk test", we have noted that we are often dropped down in the middle of a site with no idea where we are – and with this "trunk test" we can test and measure the efficacy of the website's navigation schema. In my research I have combined Krug's method with results obtained from the eye tracking method. Here, our subjects did not need to find out on a subpage different functions or graphic elements – I only asked them to indicate where they are.

(2) In the next phase, research participants were shown Print Screens of the test sites on the computer screen, though in this phase the first, main page. The print screens were prepared on October 14th, 2011. The print screens were shown to persons for 12 seconds.

(3) In the third phase of the survey, users were asked to find some information and some links on the print screen of the main pages: (1) "search", (2) "English version of the site"; (3) "News".
Persons saw the pictures, one by one, in the (1) and (3) tasks; and they navigated through the pictures at their own pace, moving onto the next by using the "space" key. The print screens were revealed for 12 seconds.

Results from the eye tracking research

The eye tracking research showed us that navigation systems of examined websites have some usability problems, and our research participants found certain functions very easily – while others were found only after a long search.

At the first part of the eye tracking research, the task was for persons to find their own place within the navigation system and on the web. They found their place on the web quite easily (e.g. "I'm on Biatorbágy's website") – yet it was not so easy for them, or fast, to find their place in the navigational system. They soon recognised the page's name, but they needed 10-15 seconds to find their place within the navigational system. They couldn't decide, either, whether or not was there a connection between the navigational system and the organisational structure of the offices.

The second task was easy: what they needed to do was to watch the main pages of the websites.

On the third task, our subjects found certain functions very easily, while others were found only after a longer search. The easy links ("utilities") were: "English version" of the site and the "Search" function; finding the "News" section took a longer time. At Cegled.hu it was very hard for users to find "Search" – and three of them gave up! Yet this function is in an unusual part of the website, and the name is also different.

Discussion

The aim of the research, organised in October 2011, was to investigate and assess the usability of the main page of three self-government websites (biatorbagy.hu, vac.hu, cegled.hu), to research their navigational systems and to do a simple usability test on the websites.

Although the group's number is relatively low (5 participants respectively), we can conclude from the results that the visual surface of the sites' main page is not only complicated and not overly transparent – also, the navigational systems of the sites are not clear enough, neither are they easy to understand (something confirmed by our Eye tracking research and by brief oral comments and feedback given by our participants).

Five participants are quite enough for the conducting of a smaller pilot-survey; for as Nielsen is able to show, the best results will come from testing no more than 5 users and running as many small tests as one can afford. (Nielsen, 2000)

In earlier research, Tom Landauer and Jacob Nielsen showed that the number of usability problems found in a usability test with n users is:

N(1-(1-L)n)

where N is the total number of usability problems in the design and L is the proportion of usability problems unearthed when testing a single user. The typical value of L is 31%, the average from across a large number of projects we studied. Plotting the curve for L=31% gives the following result:

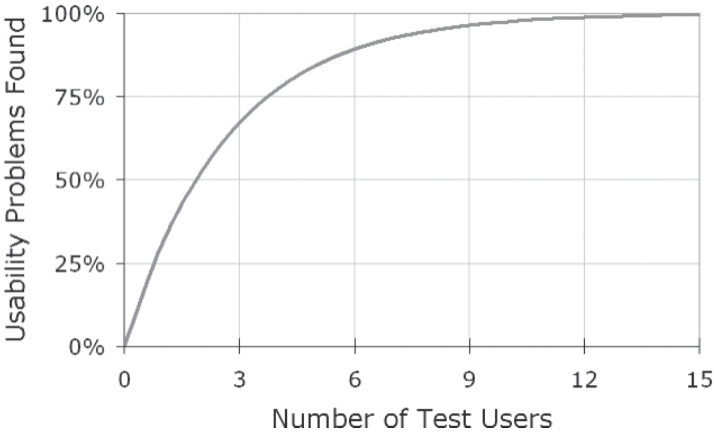

Figure 5: Usability problems found + Number of test users.
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20000319.html

The most striking truth that can be related to the curve is that zero users give zero insights.

As soon we have collected data from a single test user, our insights shoot up, however – and we have now learned almost a third of all there is to know about the usability of the design. The difference between zero and even a little bit of data is astounding, therefore.

When we test the second user, we will discover that this person does some of the same things as the first user, so there is some overlap in what we learn. People are different, though – so there will also be something new that the second user does that was not observable with the first user. Thus the second user adds some amount of new insight, but not nearly as much as the first user did.

The third user will do many things that one has already observed with the first or second user, and even some things that one has already seen twice. Plus, of course, the third user will generate a small amount of new data, albeit not as much as the first and the second user did.

As we add ever more users, we learn less and less because we will keep seeing the same things recurring again and again; thus there is no real need to keep observing the same thing multiple times – and you will most likely be motivated to go back to the drawing board and redesign the site to eliminate the now noted usability problems.

After the fifth user, we are wasting our time by observing the same findings repeatedly and not learning much new. (Nielsen – Landauer, 1993. et.al)

Connected to Landauer's and Nielsen's observation, five users are able to identify the majority of usability problems. In this research I did not wish to make note of usability problems relating to the site – but working with this amount of users was quite enough reveal information that connected with the issues I wished to look at.

The Eye tracking research also showed that understanding navigational system findings on the Print Screens of the three sites was very difficult for our research participants. Reasons here were the lacking "You are here" indicators, the missing breadcrumbs, and the way the links are located on the site.

Eye tracking research

In the Eye tracking research, as the first task, participants were asked to find their place in the site's hierarchy.

Searching for and finding one's place at the *biatorbagy.hu* site is shown in Fig. 6. As one can see on the Attention-level map, the entire surface is black, while the participant's eye-movements are shown in white. The non-black part of a visual surface shows the level of visual interest.

Subjects soon noted that they were at a subpage of the office of taxes. When I asked persons how they knew this, they said: "I can see at the menu (left-side)" and/or "I can see the breadcrumbs".

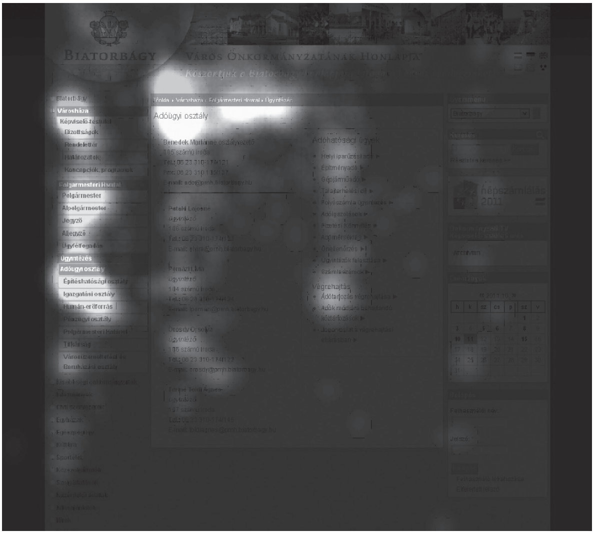

Figure 6: Attention level with the first task on the biatorbagy.hu page

At the cegled.hu website, users quickly found their place using the the navigational bar (with the office's hierarchy), finding where they were situated using the left-hand-side menu. As one can see on the Attention-level map, the menu-bar is very bright, which means that users were looking through it almost point for point.

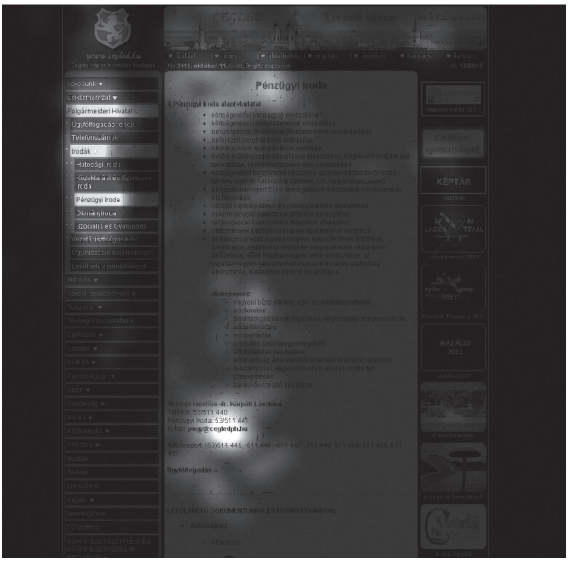

Figure 7: Attention level with the first task at the cegled.hu page

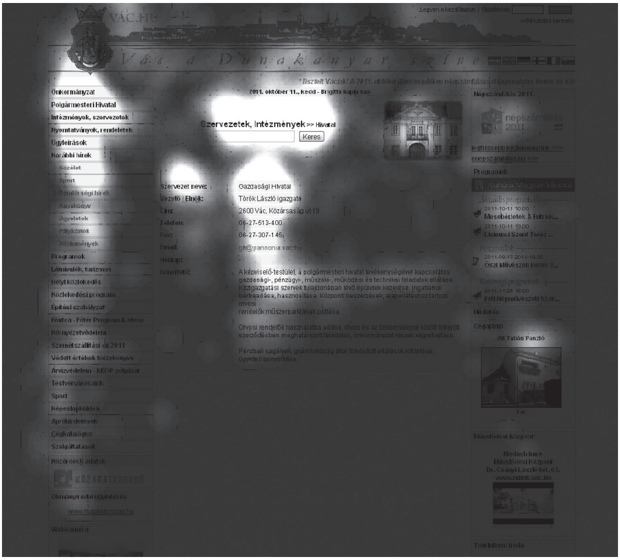

Figure 8: Attention level with the first task at the vac.hu page

When surveying the vac.hu website, users were a little confused as regards being able to find their place within the navigation system. They recognised very easily that they were on a sub-site of the Office of Taxes, though neither the breadcrumbs nor the left-sided menu were sufficient for better orientation with their "You are here" indicators; the breadcrumbs are not precise enough - and the left-side menu doesn't indicate the user's existing location at all.

In the second part of the eye tracking test, users were asked simply to look at the main page of the websites. Print screens were shown them for 12 seconds. Attention level results show that people found the most important part of the websites to be the left-side menu, article headings and pictures with faces on it. From this perspective, Biatorbágy's website seems the most efficient, while at Cegled's website the pictures on the right part of the site may well distract persons.

Figure 9: Attention level with the second task at the biatorbagy.hu page

Figure 10: Attention level with the second task at the page cegled.hu

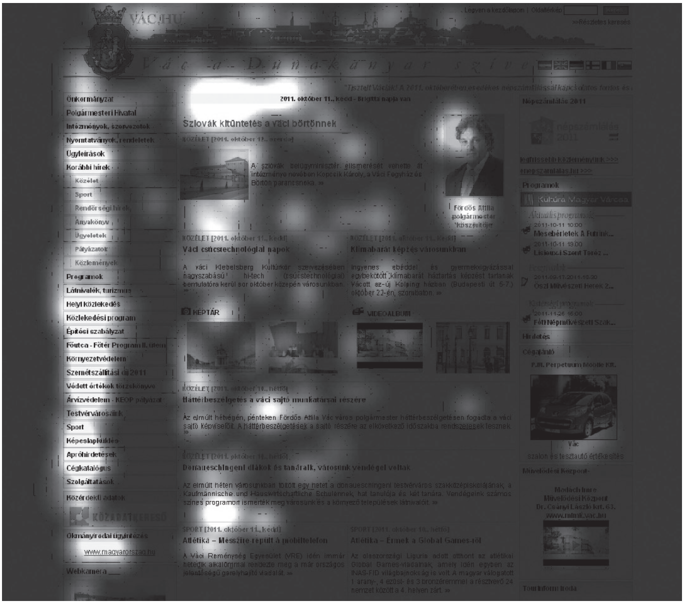

Figure 11: Attention level with the second task at the vac.hu page

In the third phase of the survey, our research participants were asked to get some information and find some links on the print screen of the main pages.

These were two types; utilities – (1) “Search”, (2) “English version of the site”; and one section, (3) “News”. People saw the pictures one after the other; they went through the pictures at their own pace, going onto the next one by using the “space” key.

Utilities are links to important elements within the site – ones that are not a part of the content hierarchy; and such elements should be less prominent than the sections – for sections are an aspect of the primary navigation step, being links to the main sections of the site, i.e. at the top level of the site’s hierarchy. (Krug, 2006 et.al)

Persons found the “Search” and “English version of the site” easily, yet they need more time to find ”News”. The reason for this might be that the “Search” and “English version of the site” utilities are located in a relatively obvious place, one well-known to site-users.

Information gained from persons’ searching for/finding information related to the “English version of the site” and ”Search” are shown in Figs. 12-17.

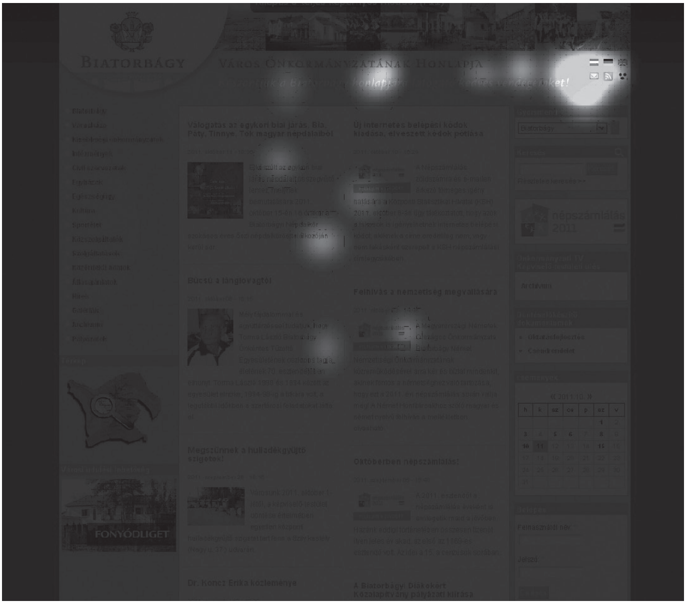

Figure 12: Searching for and finding "English version of the site" at the biatorbagy.hu page

Figure 13: Searching for and finding "English version of the site" at the cegled.hu page

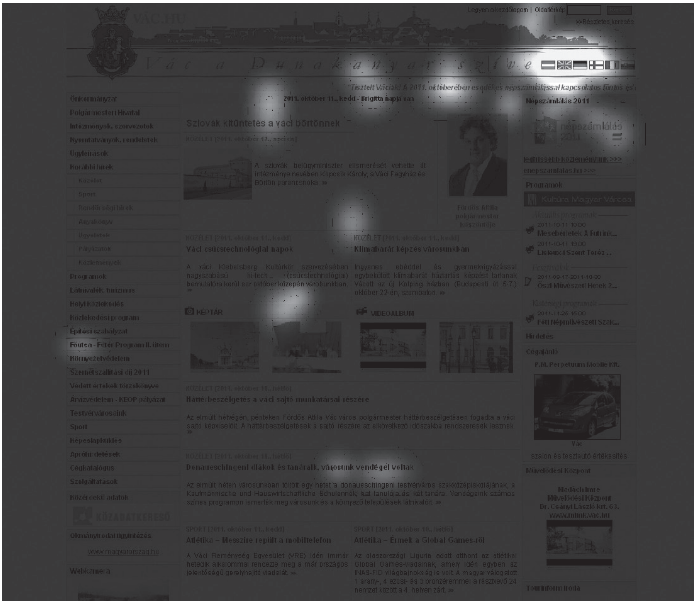

Figure 14: Searching for and finding "English version of the site" at the vac.hu page

As one can see on the Attention-level maps, the surface is black, and the user's eye-movements are shown in white. (The non-black part of a visual surface shows the level of visual interest.) Links that are easy to find are shown via clear, bright spots (see Figs. 12 and 14.) while links that are not so easy to find have larger surfaces (see Fig. 13.) The reason here is that the usual sign of the ”English version...” is not written information – it is a flag. With Figs. 12 and 14 we can see flags; at Cegléd's website the designer made a decision to use written information, and users needed more time to recognize the information.

The way our research participants found the ”Search” utility is shown in Figs. 15-18.

Figures 15 and 17 show how easily a person found the sites' "Search" link, yet the lighter, bigger surfaces show us that at cegled.hu it was quite difficult to find this utility, the reason being that on the biatorbagy.hu site and at vac.hu the ”Search” option comes in a clear, understandable and quite usual place (perhaps this is the most important aspect), while at cegled.hu this option occurs in a rather hidden, more indistinct location: at the bottom of the left-side menu-bar (see Fig. 16.).

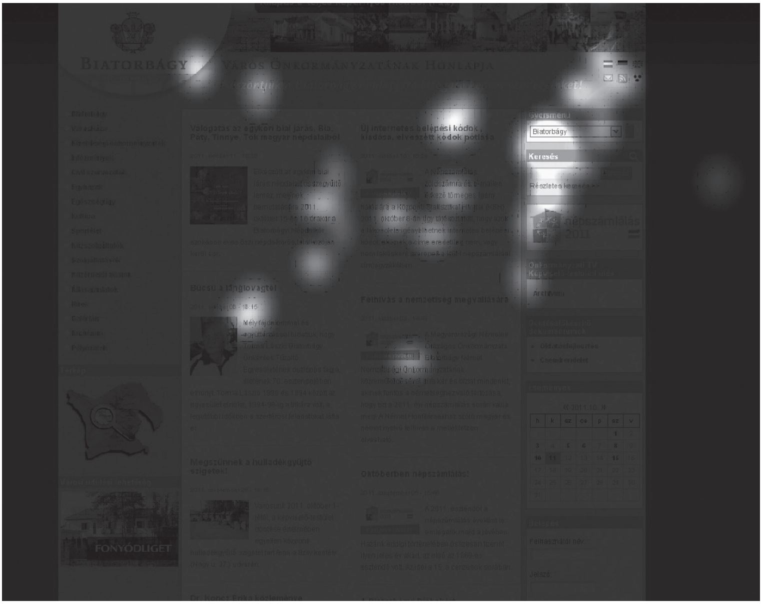

Figure 15: Searching for and finding "Search" at the biatorbagy.hu page

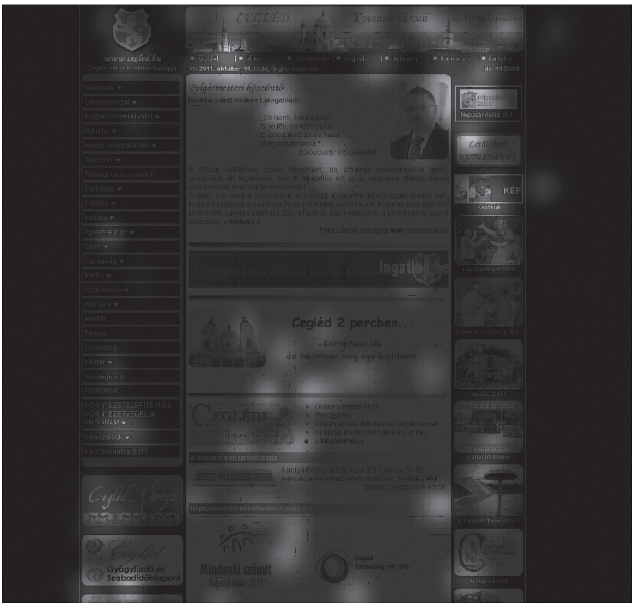

Figure 16: Searching for and finding "Search" at the cegled.hu page

Figure 17: Searching for and finding "Search" at the vac.hu. page

We can see with the cegled.hu site that persons began to look for the "Search" option in the upper, right-hand part of the site – and after they didn't find the option there, commenced scanning other parts of site.

The last task was to find the "News" section at the sites – and we can see that users began searching for this section on the left-menu bar (see Figs. 18 and 21.)

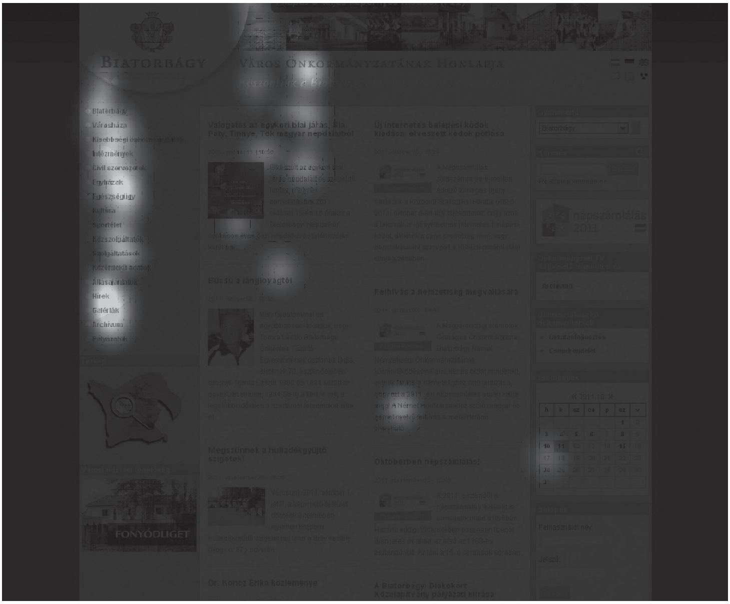

Figure 18: Searching and finding the "News" at the page biatorbagy.hu

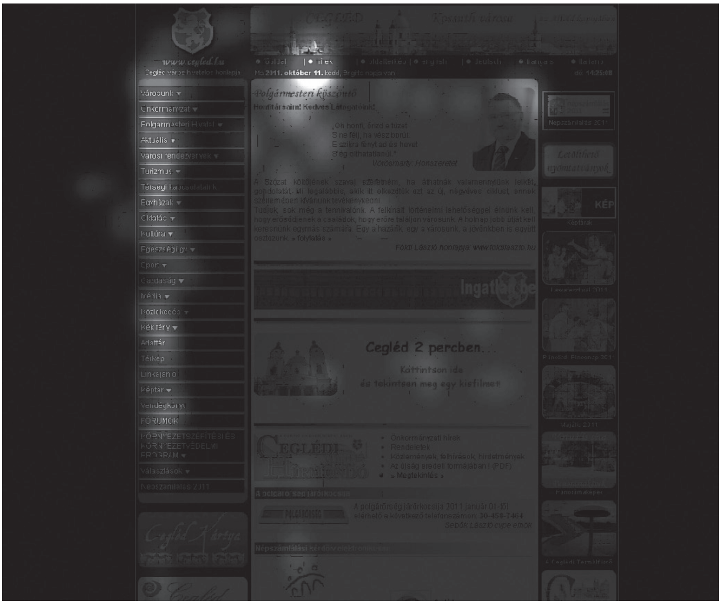

Figure 19: Searching for and finding "News" at the cegled.hu page

As one can see on the Attention-level map, users tried to find the News section among the sections, but on Cegléd's website they couldn't find it there, for at cegled.hu this section is between the utilities: "Home page", "News", "Site map", "English", "Deutsch", "Francais" and "Italiano".

The eye tracking research was very useful: although the research was conducted with only five participants, results showed very clearly which links/utilities/sections were most easy to find, which ones are well-located and which ones are hidden among too much information, in a "bad" place (i.e. not usual on the online surfaces).

Generally speaking, it was easy for our participants to find the links that are located in the way that is most common on online surfaces. So on the basis of the eye tracking research we can say that persons at times get lost and confused while searching for some links on the site.

This result is all the more interesting, too, since our participants were young and well-practiced internet-users. One wonders, then, how less-experienced internet-users manage to find the links they need.

Figure 20: Searching for and finding "News" at the vac.hu page

Short usability analysis

Connected to Krug's point of view, we can state that the researched sites have some usability problems. To be able to navigate around the site and make their own way through a hierarchy, visual signs help users; though at the tested websites some of these navigation conventions have been broken – there are too many sections, and utilities are located wrongly.

It is thus important to situate items where users try to find them, for when users scan screens, the way of scanning is based on past experiences and expectations. The elements of persistent navigation are also organised with some mistakes, e.g. there isn't a "Home" at Vac.hu, while clicking on the Crest (upper left) at Cegled.hu takes us to a sub-side related to the crest instead of the main page.

In addition, all users said that the blue background of Cegléd's site is very tiresome and aggravating, being, generally speaking, excessive; and all persons stated that the most friendly site is that of Biatorbagy.hu.

Conclusions

The visual surface of three self-government portals were examined in 2011 with the use of eye tracking research, and such research helped us get to understand and to chart the usability of the sites as well as basic usability problems.

The survey demonstrated that the three sites have some usability problems, the reason for which is a bad and non-consistent navigational system.

If this survey is to be continued, it is worth expanding it with an online focus group form of research, asking participants what they think about the general mood of the sites and any usability problems. Yet the most important task would be to redesign at least cegled.hu and vac.hu – and to be attentive to basic usability rules. It would be also helpful to supplement the design process with some usability tests.

The survey could also serve as precedent for a bigger, more representative survey, one which could help develop the site into a usable, ergonomic portal.

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Notes

1 Ez a tanulmány a Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem 4.2.1/B-09/1/KMR-2010-0005. számú TÁMOP program *Hatékony állam, szakértő közigazgatás, regionális fejlesztések a versenyképes társadalomért* alprojektjében, Az állam kapacitása – szakértők, hivatalnokok, politikusok műhelyben készült. A műhely vezetője: Ilonszki Gabriella. The author is adjunct professor at the National University of Public Service. Contact: herendy.csilla@uni-nke.hu, csilla@herendy.hu

2 Type of system: SMI RED, SensoMotoric Instruments Remote Eye-tracking Device

3 The eye-tracker system can produce several kinds of overall picture based on the recording; these enable us to establish the efficiency of visual surfaces, sequences in the scanning of different parts of a surface, and the graphics and other visual elements that are most salient; it can show us, too, if there are surfaces which subjects do *not* look at. When one tries to track a primary perception process, one needs a non-interfering measurement method, like the eye-tracking test.

Andrea Kő

EPARTICIPATION AND POLICY-MAKING SUPPORT IN UBIPOL APPROACH

Introduction

The spreading services offered by Social Web, and a variety of participatory tools such as web and opinion mining systems, online social networking, blogs, wikis, and forums, present policy-makers, governance bodies and civil society actors with an opportunity to bring about notable changes in the way future societies function. The emerging technological environment allows for processes of information and knowledge sharing across the interfaces of government and civil society, the voicing of opinions, expressions of need, and a strengthening of participation in ways that can enhance participatory democracy. In this new setting, it is likely that the new information society will have access to a large amount of information relating to people's situations, what they think and what they believe. Policy-makers and civil society groups will have access to a huge amount of information that they could use to elaborate policies, to take decisions, or to define rules of behaviour in a way that is well-informed and legitimized by its fairness and transparency. This goes beyond the pre-Social Web participation of (only) selected groups of people (e.g. trade unions, groups of employers), defined by legislative sources (Constitution, laws, etc) in the democratic process.

However, exploitation of this data may appear problematic if we look at the complex, fragmented nature of this information and also its huge quantity. We do not at present have appropriate decision-making models, process flows, or analytical and forecasting tools to be able to properly understand, interpret, visualise, act upon, and harness the forces that might be unleashed. Policy-makers need feedback about their initiatives in order to align public policies with emerging civil society needs, requirements and expectations – while civil society is in need of transparency in the policy-making process. One of the main challenges in this respect is that public policies have to operate in complex, shifting environments structured by several intervening factors related to the forces of change at global, EU, national, and regional levels. ICT can support policy-makers in modelling their policy design and implementation by capturing, analysing and acting upon a better assessment of their constituents' needs and expectations; meanwhile, it additionally offers new channels via which to communicate with citizens.

In this context there are several questions that structure the quest for optimal utilization of ICT for governance and policy modelling: how can we avoid being overwhelmed by this flood of information knowing that such a quantity of information will only increase in the future? How can we guarantee that some of the most relevant information will not be ignored, such as that originating from the lowest social strata of the population or groups that are the most marginal to society? How can we make the best use of this information and, in particular, how should it be presented in such a way that will be used to inform the policy elaboration process in a more targeted way? How can we manage interaction and coordination across civil society agents exploiting this data and, more specifically, how can we help people interact and coordinate themselves in a way that is effective? How can we support knowledge exchange and social networking so that it will not be too time-consuming and avoid information overload? How can we steer the collective intelligence of different stakeholders, to orientate it so as to augment our ability to identify trends and find solutions? How can we assure that this flow of information reaches the right government agencies or the national and regional Parliaments? It is essential that the right information reaches the right (i.e. most competent) body, institution or person.

The Information Society has been a long-standing objective of the EU. Initiatives (eEurope 2000, 2005, eEurope+, i2010, National Information Society Strategies) continue to focus on the centrality of state institutions and governments in facilitating a transition. Yet the experience of the last two decades makes it clear that emphasis on government institutions in leading the transition to an Information Society, though important, is not sufficient when it comes to public services. Furthermore, the 2011/2015 eGovernment Action Plan, published by the European Commission on the 15 December 2010, underlines clearly the importance of developing consistent policy-modelling solutions in its section dedicated to the "Involvement of citizens and businesses in policy-making processes".

In line with the above-discussed needs, eParticipation researchers have shaped a new stream of ICT application in eGovernment that enables the wider and the deeper participation of citizens in policy-making processes (PMPs). The rapid evolution in mobile computing technologies has also facilitated the emergence of mParticipation (mobile participation), to allow citizens to be involved in PMPs in a more user-friendly way. This type of system mostly focuses on how to provide citizens with ICT tools to get access to the central debating forums within governmental systems (Kanstrup et al., 2006; Macintosh et al., 2005). Nonetheless, as many researchers have suggested, the effectiveness of such electronic participation tools can be maximised only when end users (citizens) are committed and have a proactive attitude to the PMPs (Macintosh, 2007). Consequently, one of the key issues in eParticipation is to motivate citizens to become involved in policy-making processes.

This paper will be structured as follows:

First, policy modelling and governance-related problems and challenges are outlined; then, conceptual models for the analysis of policy-making processes are discussed. Finally, an overview of the Ubipol project approach and its IT environment is presented as an example of compliance with the needs laid down in the first section.

Conceptual models for the analysis of policy-making processes

Several approaches are discussed in the literature for policy-making (Birkland, 2001; Hill, 1997; Parsons, 1995). The most frequently cited theories are the following:

1. The open-systems framework of Richard Hofferbert (Hofferbert , 1974);
2. An approach involving rational actors within institutions, as developed by Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues – the IRA approach (Kiser and Osterm, 1984);
3. John Kingdon's "policy streams" framework (Kingdon, 1994);
4. The "advocacy coalition" framework, as recently developed by Sabatier (Sabatier, 1988).

E-participation in the policy-making process

Several researchers deal with e-participation models, amongst others Lourenco and Costa (2006), who propose an ICT-supported public participation model deploying collaborative writing processes to produce documents which can then be used by policy-makers as an input from citizens for policy-making processes. The strength of the model lies in the following three stages (Lee, 2010): decision-makers know how to organize contributions coming from the public, how to relate such contributions and how to integrate them. This model incorporates ordinary citizens' views via use of the internet as a communication infrastructure. The initial stage of the process is to register as a contributor, and then come three main stages in the public participation process. Registering is not only important for the contribution of ideas and opinions but also for subscribing to others' contributions and to access them. This way, it also eliminates duplicity of contributions by the public. It also acts as a personal accounting, where all information relevant to the registered contributor (participant) will be delivered. Two other important functions of registering are traceability and access security. The system is based on public collaborative writing – where persons put their ideas and opinions together or endorse other contributors. This soon takes a shape of a document which can be used by policy-makers as a working document or a representative document of many citizens having concerns. However, the model lacks a policy-making life cycle process, i.e. where the stages are clear and participants can directly contribute at any time of the policy-making process. The model complements 'problem structuring methods' used by policy-makers to help them in policy decision-making. Problem structuring methods rely heavily on stakeholders – and work best in a workshop format (Rosenhead and Mingers, 2001), being something that can be argued through when local policy-making is being considered.

A suitable framework for policy-making processes should be something that is able to identify important elements, their relationships and the flow of the process. According to Ostrom (1999), a list of variables that can identify the most relevant and general elements in a policy-making process might be used in different institutional settings. Sabatier (1999) has outlined a system of merit for selecting a framework for policy analysis – firstly, it should be broad in scope, hypothetically verifiable and can identify causal drivers; secondly, it rationally explains the policy process; and lastly, the framework should address traditional factors important to the political scientist.

Stages in the policy-making process

The policy-making process has been analysed by several researchers in the literature; here, I will detail the policy-making cycle of Macintosh (Macintosh, 2004), which has the following main stages:

- Agenda-setting
- Analyses
- Creating policy
- Implementing the policy
- Monitoring the policy.

Agenda-setting is the first step in the policy-making process, and it starts with problem definition, that is, what is to be addressed. The next step is what kind of policy is needed to best represent the perceived problem. There are two types of agenda: a public agenda, which gets a high level of attention and visibility from the public; and then there is the formal agenda (Cobb, et al. 1976). Researchers have paid attention to the creation of agendas and have come up with agenda-building models. Among the few, Cobb, et al. (1996) has described three models which are born outside the government sphere, reach the public agenda first and are then converted to a formal agenda. Second is the mobilization model, where issues are identified and raised within government – and this takes the form of a formal agenda. Yet for the successful implementation of policies, decision-makers may transfer issues to the public agenda. Third, there is the inside initiative model, something identified within the government – and decision-makers aim to stop it from becoming part of the public agenda.

The second stage of the policy-making life cycle is analysis, which establishes what the opportunities and challenges attached to agenda items are. A draft policy statement is created with a number of options after analysing the collected information and evidence from resources and actors. The next step is to create the policy. In this stage various task needs to be completed, depending on the regulation, before producing a feasible policy document; such tasks may include formal consultation, risk analysis, pilot studies and designing the implementation plan. In implementing the policy phase, execution is done, which involves the development of legislation, regulation, guidance and a delivery plan.

The last phase is monitoring the policy. This stage in the policy-making life cycle can lead back to first stage (Agenda setting), and it involves evaluation and reviewing of the policy inactive, research evidence and participants' views.

The next section will give an overview of the Ubipol project and platform, which will give a way of handling the needs discussed in the introduction and support the above-mentioned stages in the policy-making process.

Ubipol Overview

UbiPOL ((Ubiquitous Participation Platform for Policy-making, ICT-2009.7.3 (ICT for Governance and Policy Modelling), 2009-2011) aims to develop a ubiquitous platform that allows citizens to become involved in policy-making processes (PMPs) regardless of their current location and time. The project coordinator is Brunel University, and the partners are: Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Türksat Uydu Haberleşme Kablo TV ve İşletme A.Ş., Budapesti Corvinus

Egyetem, Başar Bilgisayar Sistemleri ve İletişim Teknolojileri Sanayi ve Ticaret Limited Şirketi, Sabanci University, Pdm & FC – Projectos de Desenvolvimento Manutenção Formação e Consultadoria, Lda., Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Angewandten Forschung e.V., SC IPA SA. It is suggested that the more citizens find connections between their as-usual life activities and relevant policies, the more they will become pro-active or motivated to be involved in PMPs. For this reason, UbiPOL aims to provide context-aware knowledge provision with regard to policy-making; that is, citizens using UbiPOL will be able to identify any relevant policies and other citizen's opinions whenever they want and wherever they are, in accordance with and fitting in with their as-usual life pattern. With the platform, citizens are expected to become more widely aware of any relevant policies and PMPs for involvement during their as-usual life; thus, there will be improved engagement and empowerment. Also, the platform will provide policy-tracking functionality via a workflow engine and opinion tag concept to improve the transparency of policy-making processes. Finally, the platform enables policy-makers to collect citizen opinions more efficiently – as the opinions are gathered as soon as they are created in the middle of the citizen's usual life. UbiPOL provides a security and identity management facility to ensure that only authorised citizens can have access to relevant policies, with this according with their roles in the policy-making processes. UbiPOL is a scalable platform ensuring that a large number of citizens can make use of the system at the same time (for example, for e-Voting applications) via its well-proven automatic load balancing mechanisms. The privacy-ensuring opinion-mining engine prevents the unwanted revealing of citizen identities and the mining engine stops any unrelated commercial advertisements from being included in the opinion base, to minimise misuse of the system.

Overview of Ubipol system components

Ubipol operations were planned to handle requirements outlined above. The **PMWF (Policy-making Workflow Model)** will be applied to support the eParticipation of citizens in policy-making processes. It consists of the following sub-models: a policy-making process model (PMPM) and POI model (POIM). PMPM is used by policy-makers to define and maintain policy-making processes. POIM will be utilised to define the hierarchies of POIs (Point of Interest) on a geographical map. The sub-models are inter-linked with each other to allow citizens to identify any policy issues and processes based on their current context (location or other contexts). The PMWF model has to be generic in order to specify as many policy-making processes (PMPs) of different countries as possible - and it has to be easily understandable by policy-makers who are not computer experts. Several different workflow modelling frameworks were reviewed (Lee et al., 2010) according to their major characteristics and applications. The PMWF modelling framework is expected to be a standard workflow modelling framework based on citizens' every-day life contexts as related to the public sector; and it will provide citizens with a tracking service for their involvement in any policy-making process. The **Opinion-mining component** will (a) analyse/mine the opinion-polls of users; (b) retrieve relevant policies with respect to user preferences/profiles from a policy base; and (c) classify anonymised-text which takes into consideration input from the user and the spatio-temporal context. Opinion mining is based on data, web and text-mining solutions, and use of machine-learning algorithms is the standard (Wang, 2011). The opinion-mining component will be responsible for a sentiment analysis of citizens' opinions – and this issue is extremely important for policy-makers nowadays because it is an objective and effective way to get feedback regarding initiatives. Sentiment analysis is a top research area with several research tracks, like sentiment and subjectivity classifications, feature-based sentiment analysis, sentiment analysis relating to comparative sentences, opinion search and retrieval (Liu, 2010). The opinion-mining component will analyse opinions based on their content, too. Content determination will use ontologies from the policy-making domain, like transportation, pollution or library establishment. Ontologies will provide the semantic backbone for opinion processing. According to the most often cited Gruber definition (Gruber, 1993), ontologies are explicit specifications of a conceptualization. Our way of operating will incorporate a custom ontology for polarity analysis, with a custom-built polarity words' database constructed by SentiWordNet project, as well as manual human scoring. This polarity ontology can be integrated and used with other domain ontologies to tackle different problems (Taner, 2011). Since opinion polls may contain sensitive information, the Ubipol solution keeps the privacy of individuals when doing data analysis. Privacy-maintaining data mining aims to develop techniques that would facilitate data mining while preserving the privacy of individuals (Agrawal & Srikant, 2000). The **Identity management component** will be responsible for users' identification, authentication and authorization. It will guarantee that only authorised citizens or policy-makers can create and view the massed amount of citizen opinions. Delivery of opinion and policy data over the wireless network is secure as the platform uses a cutting-edge encryption algorithm in its communication kernels. Scalable **server architecture** will enable the platform to support a huge number of simultaneous requests (serving at least more than 100,000 citizens' requests concurrently). A **Ubiquitous platform** will be developed aiming to facilitate citizen participation in policy-making processes in the middle of their everyday lives.

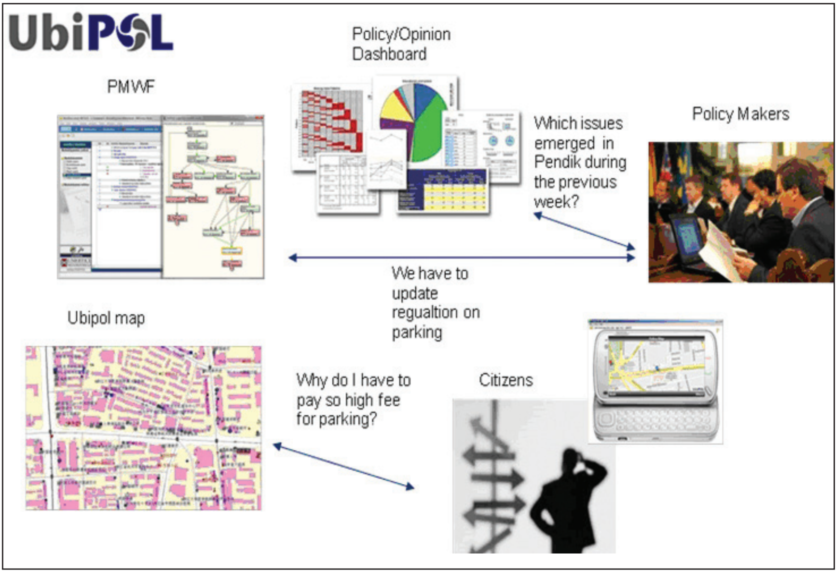

Figure 1 Ubipol overview

Ubipol services

The Ubipol project offers services for citizens and policy-makers. The most important ones are the following:

- Authorisation services: Each policy has different stakeholders, depending on its nature. Security services will ensure an identified citizen will only have access to the authorised policies according to their roles.
- Retrieval services: For a given context, this service will retrieve a list of policies applicable to the citizen/context. The service allows condition-based retrieval of relevant policies, including "query by PMP state", "query by policy category" and so on.
- Notification services: For given policy items, this service notifies subscribed citizens.
- Tracking services: For a given opinion tag, show how it was (is being) used for the progress of relevant policy-making processes.

- Opinion-sharing services: For a given policy issue, this service reveals other citizens' opinions whilst protecting the citizens' identity.

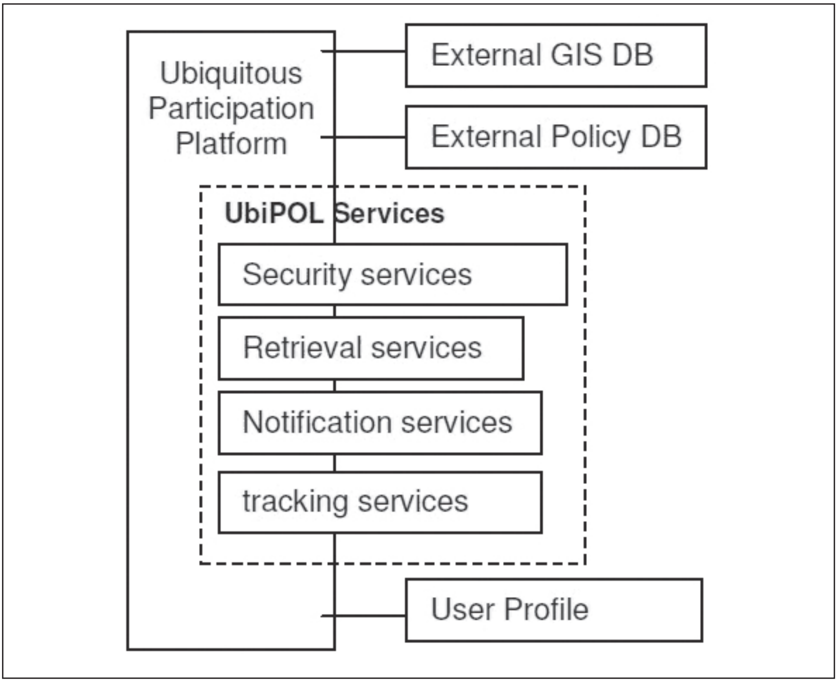

Figure 2 Ubipol services

Conclusion – The unique characteristics of the UbiPol way of operating

Based on the review of the literature, the novelty of UbiPOL can be described as follows. Ubipol provides **ubiquitous governance model** for both citizens and policy-makers; and policy-making related information processing has been thoroughly integrated into everyday object usage, like handheld devices and activities. The applied governance model incorporates Government-to-Citizen (G2C), Citizen-to-Government (C2G) and Citizen-to-Citizen (C2C) interactions in policy-making. Citizens have a chance to discuss with each other the issues and policies they are interested in. The Ubipol solution offers **location-based policy-map services** to citizens. Location-based computing technology is widely applied, though Ubipol provides policy map services for handheld devices based on current location and relevant site objects. The Ubipol platform will be available through **mobile e-participation tools** to citizens and policy-makers, to increase citizens' motivation to participate in policy-making processes. Policy issues related to citizens' interests will be linked with geographical objects, thereby providing them with a context-sensitive and user-friendly way to join a specific issue-related community. The main innovations of UbiPOL in the **opinion-mining** research area are the anonymisation of text-based opinions within a spatio-temporal context; private **semantic information retrieval** based on an ontology outlined in policies; and ubiquitous data-mining at the device level, along with privacy-preserving data-mining at the server level. The Ubipol way of operating will enable language- and culture-independent user interfaces for mobile devices via the creation, learning, sharing and tracking of a group knowledge that cuts across language and cultural interpretations. The UbiPOL platform facilitates knowledge-sharing among citizens with an "Opinion Tag" concept, these being virtual Post-It notes that store citizens' opinions on site objects. Each policy-related site object on the street will have opinion tags attached, ones created by citizens, forming group knowledge. The opinion tags will be shared by citizens and provide input for policy-making with regard to site objects. UbiPOL is to be designed for use in different cultural contexts (language and practices) and it will be tested in two different countries (the UK and Turkey) to show its applicability in diverse cultural contexts.

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Emese Belényesi

EFFICIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION – OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Nowadays, there is growing interest in the role of *local government communication* in the life of the community. At the same time, *efficiency,* the feature most frequently associated with this activity, is articulated as a clear expectation. Let's go beyond the concept of *efficient communication* and see what *efficient* means in this particular context, and where this attribute comes from.

The idea of *efficiency*, as with many other paradigms, originates in economic life. It became widespread in the private sector, and was taken over by – among others – the public sector, including public administration. In general, it means realization of the most possible 'income' or gain – or achievement of a given 'income' – by use of the fewest possible resources. Therefore, efficiency is a relative concept, and we always need to compare several options to decide which version will be more efficient or more economical. While in the *public sector* the notion of efficiency is understood in relation to outputs reflecting inputs and a given effect, in *public administration* it is usually interpreted in terms of the social value or surplus value produced out of one unit of input. As it is measured by contrasting inputs with results, it encourages the attaining of results by the usage of reasonably low inputs - which requires purposeful planning.

As organizing the life of a local community is one of the most essential functions of local governments, the *efficiency of local government* communication is indicated by the extent to which its efforts match those of members of the local community. Well-planned and purposeful local government activity plays a major role in this process; while successful implementation depends on the availability and the utilization of the competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) needed for an effective operation that will gain most both regarding local government leadership and the involvement of citizens.

A question arises: how can local governments gain the knowledge necessary to meet the above-mentioned expectations? In this study we will search for answers to this question by giving an overview of the areas where local government communication is applied, opportunities for learning, and by presenting the benefits that the alternative method of bench-learning may offer.

The fields of local government communication

In Hungarian practice, several communities have communication plans or strategies,[1] which usually cover the following four areas of application: *internal institutional communication, external local policy communication*, *tourism- and business communication*. These might be supplemented by the *mayor's communication* if, besides public administration and the public service activities of a local government, the political aspect is also taken into account. The goals and the content of these applications are different but interconnected.[2] (Table 1.)

Table 1. Local government communication – field of application

Field of application	**Goal and content**
Mayor's communication	Development of a profile and a communication strategy for the mayor; the creation of his/her image as a politician; definition of relations and communications with voters.
Internal institutional communication	Improved information sharing with elected officials, civil service staff and professional and civil organizations in relation to local government matters.
External local policy communication	Information for local residents in connection with goals, efforts, measures, events, and long-term visions of the local government; listening to the initiatives and opinions of residents, ongoing evaluation of citizen input, information on potential investors/business owners.
Tourism communication	Information for Hungarian and foreign visitors about the village/town/city, events taking place, places of historic and tourism-related interest, cultural programs; attracting domestic and foreign visitors to the village/town/city.
Business communication	Targeted information for Hungarian/foreign business people about opportunities for investment, opportunities for building up trade and other relations and investment environment.

Source: Author

Based on all of the above, we can say that each field of application assumes different types of knowledge and abilities that may facilitate efficient communication tailored to special local needs. If our intention is to map how Hungarian local governments are able to achieve such expertise, it seems necessary to explore the variety of available training program offers from among which relevant persons can choose those addressing the most relevant objectives, content needs and approaches.

How can knowledge and the relevant skills be acquired?

Training is still the most traditional way of acquiring knowledge. With local governments there are two levels to be considered. One includes the appointed staff, that is, the civil servants (managers and administrators) who might benefit from public administration training and professional development programs that will serve as a source of knowledge for them; the other is the political level, which affects mayors and deputy mayors as well as elected representatives. Efficient communication skills in relation to local residents (voters) are particularly important for the latter. The training of political actors was for a long time a much neglected field, though, now, realizing its importance, several initiatives have been taken to meet needs here. In Hungary, there are opportunities offered for the training of both target groups, both separately and jointly – as analyzed in the following sections.

Training for the public administration level

The required knowledge is to be gained here primarily within the framework of the national system of further training of civil servants, as regulated by government decree 199/1998 (XII.4.) – on the *further training of civil servants and public administration leadership training;* this is managed by the National Institute of Public Administration.

An *Efficient Communication* training program (2-days, 16 hrs.) is on offer under the Further Training section as part of the wide ranging selection of Central Training Programs, in the Category of Organizational and Professional Development. It is the second module of the Personal Efficiency Development Program, which aims at providing civil servants with communication tools to facilitate their everyday work. The training methodology provides for experiential competency development, something suitable for the development of personal capabilities and strengths. The theoretical preparation and the situational tasks ensure that participants can master techniques and behavioral strategies that will make their personal and workplace relationships less stressful – or even a source of happiness – while they also become more successful in handling and solving problems. [3]

Already existing heads along with aspiring leaders involved in succession planning are able to choose from among the following 11 leadership modules: Personality of the Leader; Team Building; Cooperation; *Communication*; Conflict Management; Stress Management; Leadership Styles; Strategic Thinking; Strategic Management; Project Management; Negotiation Techniques. The main goal of this training is to create and institutionalize a legally regulated, integrated, and credit-based development system that suits the civil service merit system and ensures high quality training for the Hungarian public administration elite and is also for leader-succession planning.[4]

The *Communication Workshop* (2-days, 16 hrs.) No XII/15/2008 is listed in the registry of the Accredited Programs as part of the Public Administration Leadership Academy (central program), which is the third module of the aspiring leader training course. The target group is civil servants in leadership positions with 0-5 years of leadership experience and those who have not yet been appointed but who are being considered for succession. The program includes the development of interpersonal communication, practical demonstration of the special features of organizational communication, and the learning of assertive communication techniques.

Alongside this, there is another program – No. M010502, entitled *Public Communication for Public Administration Leaders* (1+2 days, 24 hrs.) The target group here is senior executives, managers, key persons within public administration organizations, and civil servants responsible for particular professional fields (and delegated to the training by their managers). In the category of *Other leadership training* and *Other competency development* we can also find interactive training workshops, which include communication. These have been developed and offered to local governments by private training organizations.[5]

We are able to conclude that all three training programs offered at the public administration level primarily focus on the internal institutional (leader's) communication, though in one case the external local policy (leader's) communication is also addressed. In terms of methods of delivery, the practice-oriented training methodology predominates.

Training for the political level

In this regard, we cannot talk about a nationwide training system, for this system is much more fragmented – public institutions and civil and business organizations also offer training programs. Traditions here have a much shorter history, except for a few isolated initiatives. Trainings offered to mayors sprang up mostly in the period before the local government elections of 2010.

The program entitled *The Mayor* can be found on the list of offers of the national *Institute of Public Administration*, being among the *Central Training Programs*, and in the category *E-courses*. The target group is mayors and deputy mayors, and local representatives. Training program topic areas are: legal status of the mayor; mayors and the board of representatives; the mayor's contacts with local government organs; alternative resource mobilization; property and management. The training methodology is an e-learning-based, distance education and blended learning (e-learning with tutoring), covering five participants. The electronic learning material includes self-assessment tests, via which the participant can evaluate his/her own progress. The duration time of the training is 30 days. Unfortunately, the popularity of this course has been very low - only few people have completed it so far; thus it is registered, but is not 'active' at the moment.[6]

The local government capacity-building system is important for the National Association of Local Governments (NALOG), an advocacy organization to enhance the development of local government management and improve professional expertise. To this end, in tandem with partners it launched the Mayor's Academy pilot training scheme; something funded by the project and called the *Local Government Capacity Building Program based on the experiences of Norway 2009-2010*.[7] Its duration was 10 months – one weekend a month at the Faculty of Public Administration. Course topics included all fields where the mayor is or should be competent: city planning, urban development, informatics for users, decision theory, leadership techniques, *communication*, city marketing, budget management, project writing, project management, and strategic planning. The target group is local government leaders – mayors, deputy mayors, local representatives, committee chairpersons and committee members.

Program concerns were local lawmaking, local government contracts, the mayor and the board of representatives, institution management, strategic management, strategic planning, strategic leadership, local government finances, *efficient time management and local government communication*, project management and public procurement, negotiation techniques, the public relations of local governments – from external communication to etiquette, and conflict management.

The training methodology was lectures transferring theoretical knowledge along with skills development training. In addition, in 2011 NALOG announced the Local Government Knowledge Program, the modules of which attach to the above program: *I have become a Mayor* – an intensive basic training, Credentialed Mayor training, professional development for local government leaders, and the Training of Representatives; all of these include communication skills.[8]

Gondolatindító Ltd. (G) is a private company that offers a series of programs – *I will be a mayor!* – to improve the capacities of local candidates. It is available on an interactive website. They offer the following training programs: The mayor and change; Interim elections today; First steps; and *"P" as political marketing.* Communication makes up at least 50% of the training material of all programs. The primary target group is local election candidates. The training methodology is distance education, where learning materials are available electronically (DVD, text, MP3 file), in a printable version, too. The program developers (tutors) are accessible online and are available for personal consultation and tele-counselling as well. Participants can download free materials from the website, which are very useful not only as resource materials - they can be additionally used for marketing purposes. Training is supplemented by additional services like counseling, manufacturing leaflets, and conducting public opinion polls. This successful program was followed by the *"I have become a mayor"* program, which offers training in etiquette, protocol, communication, PR, marketing, and informatics basics for those participants from the previous program who were elected. Unfortunately, due to a lack of interest this project did not last long, thereby disappointing its developers.[9]

We can see that the picture is fairly diverse at the political level: in the first program external local policy communication is being targeted, in the second one both internal institutional and external local policy communication are addressed, while the third focuses on the mayor's communication only. From the point of view of teaching methodology, the picture is nevertheless multi-faceted, for the choice is quite wide, ranging from lectures to practice-oriented workshops and e-learning based distance education.

Joint training for both levels

Here, the training programs offered to the two levels are not separated, so participants usually comprise mayors, deputy mayors, local representatives, committee chairpersons, committee members, and the notary, as well as officials responsible for communication – who constitute the main target group. The 2 or 4-term specialized further training degree courses (previously postgraduate courses) consist of basic, professional and supplementary modules. The goal of these training programs is to train communication experts (working in local government), who are capable of operating, expanding and keeping up the internal and external local government communications networks and who are able to create a uniform image regarding local government while transmitting the local decisions made at various – political, cultural, social – levels.

The Illyés Gyula College Faculty of the University of Pécs (PTE IGYF) also offers education in *Local government communication,* which is meant to contribute to the development of personal capacities and skills. These are strategic thinking, high level skills in oral and written communication, the ability to work independently, creativity, flexibility, logical thinking, information processing, sensitivity to the social environment and needs, and having an ability for cooperation and teamwork. The qualification being offered is that of Local Government Communicator. [10]

The King Zsigmond College (ZSKF) has a similar education program in *Local government communication*, which provides an opportunity for participants to expand their existing knowledge regarding Hungarian local government and communication practice. They learn the basics of public administration and law, local government operations and finance, as well as basic crisis management. Additionally, they learn Organization and Management, and Sociology, though media subjects like Communication Theory, History of the Press, Media Knowledge, Marketing, and PR Communication are also emphasized. The qualification offered is that of Local Government Communicator.[11]

In the education program of the Public Administration Further Training Institute at the Faculty of Public Administration of the Corvinus University of Budapest (BCE ÁTI) participants are given a two-term *Public service communication* further training degree course, in which they learn about the structure and regulation of public administration within the public service sector; and they get to understand the mechanisms of its operation. Persons will be able to develop the communication strategy of a public service organization, plan and organize its internal and external communications, keep contact with residents, partner organizations, civil organizations, businesses, and the media; process and make follow-up analyses of electronic or printed bulletins, organize events and programs, handle protocol, and communicate on behalf of the organization; it is in essence performing the tasks of a spokesperson. The qualification offered is that of Public Service Communication Manager.[12]

We can conclude here that, in terms of content area, the joint training courses for both levels include the most comprehensive knowledge; except for the mayor's communication, practically all other aspects mentioned are covered. From a methodological point of view, however, the picture is one-dimensional, being typically built up on the predominance of lectures.

A comparison of training programs

Comparing the three types of training in terms of content, it is striking that tourism and business communication are missing from the training programs on offer at both the public administration and the political levels, while none of the three levels cover all fields of local government communication. The mayor's communication appears at one level only, which is, however, justifiable. [13] (Table 2)

Table 2. Comparison of the three types of training in terms of content

Fields of local government communication	Training for the public administration level	Training for the political level	Joint training for both levels
Mayor communication		G: *I will be a mayor!*	
Internal institutional communication	NIPA: *Further Training, Leadership training, accredited programs*	NALOG: *Mayor's Academy*	PTE IGYF and ZSKF: *Local government communication* BCE ÁTI: *Public service communication*
External local policy communication	NIPA: *Accredited programs*	NIPA: *Mayor E-course* NALOG: *Mayor's Academy*	PTE IGYF and ZSKF: *Local government communication* BCE ÁTI: *Public service communication*
Tourism communication			PTE IGYF and ZSKF: *Local government communication* BCE ÁTI: *Public service communication*
Business communication			PTE IGYF and ZSKF: *Local government communication* BCE ÁTI: *Public service communication*

Source: Author

If we summarize local government communication training opportunities in Hungary, we can state that the most comprehensive program is that of the joint training for both levels offered by the specialized further training degree courses.

Comparing the three types of training in terms of teaching methodology, it is noteworthy that only training for the political level covers all three methods;

while training for the public administration level and a joint training for both levels apply only one method each - which might be attributed to circumstances.[14] (Table 3)

Table 3. Comparison of the three types of training in terms of training methodology

Teaching methods applied	Training for the public administration level	Training for the political level	Joint training for both levels
Lectures		NALOG: *Mayor's Academy*	PTE IGYF and ZSKF: *Local Government Communication* BCE ÁTI: *Public Service Communication*
Interactive workshops	NIPA: *Further Training, Leadership training, accredited programs*	NALOG: *Mayor's Academy*	
E-learning		NIPA: *Mayor E-course G: I will be a mayor!*	

Source: Author

If we make a summary of Hungarian training options on the basis of training methodology, we can conclude that, regarding training offered for the political level, the Mayor's Academy provides most (two kinds of) opportunities.

Therefore, it is appropriate to ask whether comprehensive competency development necessitates the application of all three kinds of methodological approach, or not. If we note that lectures are primarily suitable for knowledge transfer, that interactive workshops are for skills development (perhaps for changes in attitudes in the long run) and e-learning distance education is utilized principally to save time and costs, the answer to our question is: not necessarily. On the other hand, if we assume that these methods may serve to reinforce one another, we can say that a combined application can increase the training impact, and might even save some expense.

To sum up here, one can conclude that while from a content point of view Hungarian training offers lack a comprehensive local government communication program covering all fields of local government communication, from a methodological point of view such offers do seem to be all-encompassing.

There is another very effective development method to supplement the above-mentioned ones, which also provides an experiential learning opportunity – as seen in the following case study.

An alternative opportunity: bench-learning – a case study

Besides training, other alternative options might be of benefit in the field of local government communication. These are benchmarks, here meaning a comparison of best practices in order to make them reference points; as well as the bench-learning process, which serves the purposes of rapid learning and development.

The above-mentioned Association (NALOG) issued a call for proposals within the framework of the Local government capacity building program based on the experiences of Norway 2009-2010 project in relation to application of the bench-learning[15] method. The use of this method, as implemented in this project, is in practice a local government exchange of experience with the purpose of introducing bench-learning into local public administration. The system provides an opportunity for heads and civil servants in local governments to learn from one another in order to improve the quality of public services, their own abilities and motivation.

This method ensures that local governments can identify the advantages and drawbacks of the practices and experiences, and also the problems that might occur, as well as possible solutions and techniques associated with such solutions.

Group meetings were held in each topic area with the participation of four representatives of four local governments; and the meetings were hosted by local governments that were able to present their best practices. The main effort behind this was to provide the opportunity for decision-makers, civil servants and experts from various parts of the country to learn about problems existing – and solutions to such problems – in other regions. The use of bench-learning also sought to generate useful data in certain fields and results that other local governments might rely on.

The Exchange of experience program began in January 2010, with the participation of selected local governments, dealing with four topic areas that were regarded as essential: public education, social care, health care and energy. The programs' titles were: Cooperation for the improvement of the quality of public education; Step by step, Options for the efficient operation of emergency medical services; Geothermic Exchange of Experience. On the basis of opportunities gained and the practice of learning from one another, it was possible to see differences and the similarities occurring in the provision of public services, and to come up with recommendations regarding directions of change. What evolved during the program – the best local government practices – were published in a series of methodological booklets called "JÓTÁR".[16]

Besides the above project, the Association (NALOG) initiated a Best Local Government Practices program and a call for proposals relating to the "Transfer of best practices" for the third time in 2010. The partners of the Association of Local Governments in this initiative were the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy of the Council of Europe, the National Development Agency, and the Open Society Institute Foundation (OSI). The Hungarian Association of Villages and the Association of Hungarian Local Governments also took active parts in its implementation. In 2010, local governments were able to compete for the Best Local Government Practices Reward in the following three areas: Local government communication; Roma integration for strengthening social cohesion; and Strengthening a sense of belonging to the local community.

In the first category, the Local government communication priority addressed 'outward' communication practices, and not internal organizational communications. The most favoured activities were those that a local government had already done in relation to local residents or external partners, and which had been institutionalized, tested and proved effective; a further advantage for an applicant was if the practice had been included in local government communication strategy. The intention was to support practices in which the local government holds efficient dialogue with local residents and/or other partners based on the principle of participatory democracy.

The 2010 application period closed on 15 May 2011. There were four proposals under the priority of communication: (1) XIII. District of Budapest – Rehabilitation of the housing estate and walking area in Országbíró Street via the active engagement of residents by means of new ways of communication and community planning; (2) Nyim -The adoption of Nyim Village; (3) Sátoraljaújhely - Sátoraljaújhely, our town for 750 years; (4) Tapolca – Renewal of the Tapolca website. The Steering Committee of the program evaluated applications in August, and expert assessment was followed by field visits, when the owners of the best projects were invited to compete for the 1 million Ft prize (offered in each topic area) via a presentation. The opportunity was on offer here for applications ranked 1-3 besides those who had competed in the other categories.

The closing event of the 2010 application period – the final contest – took place on 22 September at a Dialogue with the local governments conference, something focusing on local government communication. This was organized by

NALOG, the Danube Association of communities, and Corvinus University of Budapest. Each local government was given 10 minutes to present its project. The high quality presentations were interesting and very professional. The Steering Committee made its decision on the basis of the submitted proposals, the quality of implementation and the given presentation. The main prize was won by the XIII. District of Budapest – Rehabilitation of the housing estate and walking area in Országbíró Street via the active engagement of the residents by means of new ways of communication and community planning.

One of the most important 'by-products' of the project is the organizational learning that occurred in the field of local government communication.

As we can see, bench-learning is not only an extraordinarily effective method of development covering all areas of local government communications - it has an additional benefit, by providing an opportunity for professional networking, which in turn promotes social lesson learning.

Summary

In the study we have been looking at areas of local government communication on the one hand – and the opportunities on offer in Hungary for the development of the knowledge and skills necessary for its efficient application on the other. The analysis was aimed at the content-related factors and the training methodology for training programs being offered to the public administration, and the political levels, either separately or jointly (i.e. to both levels). Finally, we present the development opportunities inherent in an alternative method. Our conclusion is that on the Hungarian training market there is not one single program that might cover all the fields of application of local government communication – and there is no program that makes use of more than two training methods either.

Thus, it is recommended that there is an expanding of the content area, within a modular system, which will take on board all five application areas; and it should be flexibly adjustable to the training needs of particular target groups. Nonetheless, it is advisable to use the widest possible variety of training methods for the development of local government communication competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) too. For example, interactive workshops and/or bench-learning in the form of a field trip might be built into the specialized further training degree program so that participants can become involved in experiential learning situations; while another methodological option could be blended-learning - a combination of real-presence training forms (lecture, workshop) with e-learning, which can lead to more cost-efficient training events.

So we may consider several options for development, yet if we want to make the best choice we should not forget to look at the needs of our target groups; for this would facilitate program development – perhaps directing it towards a modular system – which could enhance efficient local government communication by meeting the special needs of actual participants.

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Notes

1 Local government communication strategies and plans are found in the References list.

2 http://varosimazs.hu/popup/oldalterkep.html

3 http://www.nki.gov.hu/kepzesek-vizsgak/tovabbkepzes/kepzesi-kinalat/koezponti-kepzesek/szervezetfejlesztes

4 http://www.nki.gov.hu/kepzesek-vizsgak/vezet-kepzes

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6 http://www.nki.gov.hu/kepzesek-vizsgak/tovabbkepzes/kepzesi-kinalat/koezponti-kepzesek/e-kurzusok/188-polgarmester

7 The project of NALOG and its partners, the Corvinus University of Budapest, Faculty of Public Administration, the Local and Regional Association of Norwegian Local Governments – entitled Local Government Capacity Building Program based on the expriences of Norway 2009-2010 – gained support in 2009. The program has in it three content areas: (1) Development of the Mayor's Academy, training program and training; (2) organization of workshops presenting best practices, and an exchange of experiences among local governments in four areas: education, social affairs, health care, and environment protection-energy; and (3) training for boards of representatives.

8 http://www.toosz.hu/digitalcity/homepage.jsp?dom=AAAAZJWX&fmn=BAAFJXRM&prt=AAAAYFAP&men=BAAFJXRL

9 http://polgarmesterleszek.hu/tananyagaink/

10 http://www.igyfk.pte.hu/files/tiny_mce/File/felvetelizoknek/tovabbkepzesek2011/onkormanyzati_kommunikacio.pdf

11 http://www.zskf.hu/?page_id=114

12 http://kozigazgatastudomany.uni-corvinus.hu/index.php?id=36275&no_cache=1

13 E.g. civil servants have to remain politically independent, so they are not allowed to be involved in political marketing activities – thus the topic is not justified in the first or the third case.

14 E.g. with the specialized degree courses, opportunities are determined by the conservativism of higher education and/or the classroom arrangements.

15 Bench-learning means learning from one another, which is one of the most efficient ways of gaining knowledge. The great advantage of the bench-learning technique, compared to other methodogies based on an exchange of experiences, is that learning here focuses on direct and individually defined special needs.

16 http://www.toosz.hu/digitalcity/news/portalNews.jsp?dom=AAAAZJWX&hir=BAAFGZOM&fmn=AAAAYWOV&prt=AAAAYFAP