

Case Study

Efficient Mechanisms of Cooperation between Non-Governmental Organisations and Public Authorities

Rucsandra FILLOREANU¹, Iulia POPESCU², Gabriela SINCA³

Abstract: This paper aims to present to the wide public a success story concerning the efficient cooperation between the civil society as a whole (citizens, NGOs, stake holders) and public administration authorities. The success consists in using and strengthening dialogue measures within the collaboration of the two actors. The research is based on a study case. This was run through an EU funded project - “Efficient mechanisms of cooperation with public authorities”. The goal of the project was to increase the capacity of non-governmental organizations to cooperate with the public administration institutions. In order to reach the proposed aim there have been organized a series of theoretical and practical training courses, roundtable discussions and study-visits. Through this manner it has been encouraged and practiced the structured dialog on public agenda issues between the representatives of the local and national authorities and the active citizens. The outputs of the project consist in one Public Consultation Guide elaborated on the basis of good practices acknowledged through the project and two local citizens` initiatives on local public administration matters that have been brought into the public attention of the decision-making actors. Active citizenship, structured dialogue between civil society and state actors, developed tools for effective advocacy and lobby that are part of the success story that we intend to present through this study case.

Keywords: civil society; public administration; strengthening dialogue; effective advocacy

1. Introduction

This paper aims at presenting a study case regarding the capacity of non-governmental organizations to cooperate with the public administration institutions. The study was run through the project “Efficient mechanisms of cooperation with public authorities” that has been implemented in December 2012

¹Manager of Programs, European Institute for Participatory Democracy – Qvorum, Address: Bucharest, Romania, 0040 721 554 044, Corresponding author: rucsandra.filloreanu@qvorum.

² Director of Programs, European Institute for Participatory Democracy – Qvorum, Address: Bucharest, Romania, 0040 722 122 110, iulia.popescu@qvorum.ro.

³ Assistant Program, European Institute for Participatory Democracy – Qvorum, Address: Bucharest, Romania, 0040 765 262 871, gabriela.sinca@qvorum.ro.

– December 2013 by the European Institute for Participatory Democracy – Qvorum in partnership with IRENE Association from Milan, Italy. The project has been funded by the European Social Fund through the Operational Programme Administrative Capacity Development 2007-2013 - “Innovation in Administration”.

The main problem addressed through the project concerns the very low ability of efficient cooperation between the civil society and public administration authorities in Romania.

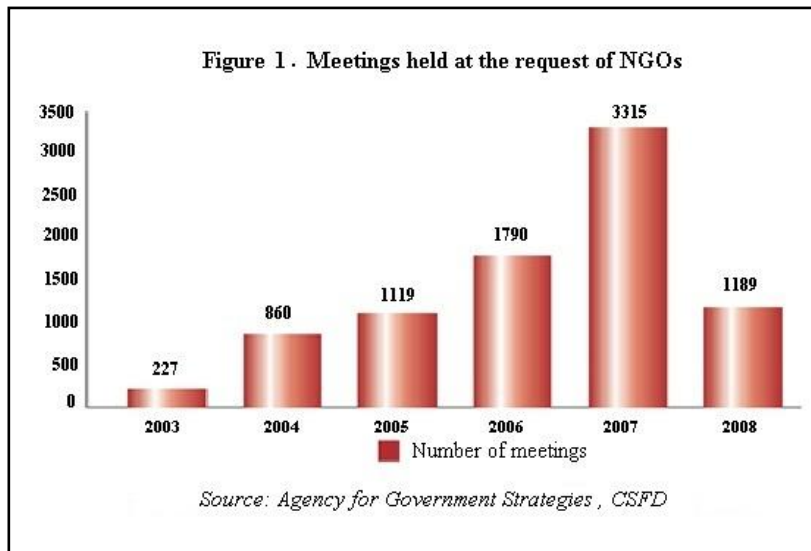
A study made in 2010 by the Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF)¹ shows that the relationship between public administration and non-governmental sector seems to have entered a deadlock situation, meaning that there are not significant elements that indicate a progress or a positive change in the relationship between sectors at the level of policy decision-making process.

The problem that the society is facing has several causes: on the one hand there is a lack of information, knowledge and skills of the personnel of non-governmental organizations to dialogue and collaborate with the representatives of the public administration institutions and, on the other hand, is about the lack of compulsory public consultation procedures in the public administration institutions.

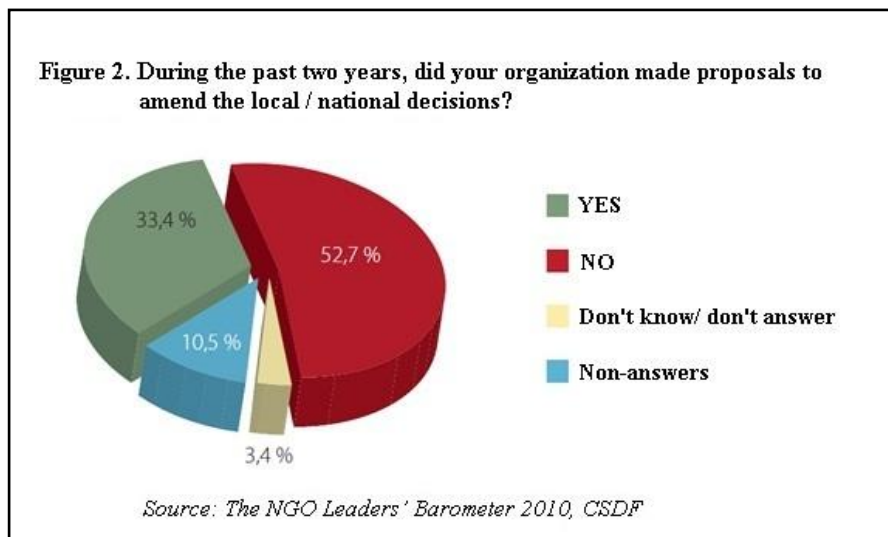
The first cause can be translated as a low degree of civic-participatory culture of the members of the organized civil society. This leads to a lack of knowledge regarding the functioning of the central and local public administration institutions and how civil society can actively take part within the decision-making process. Statistics show that, although in the recent years, NGOs have shown a growing interest in the cooperation with public authorities and participating in the public policy decision process, their involvement is still low. Thus, the number of observations submitted by various non-governmental organizations to the public authorities in consultative processes was in 2008 about 7662, compared to 2005 when the number of these observations was 7140. At the same time, the number of meetings between NGOs and local authorities organized at the request of NGOs in 2008 was only of 1189².

¹ CSDF, “Romania in 2010. Nongovernmental sector. Profile, trends, challenges”.

²CSDF, “Romania in 2010. Nongovernmental sector. Profile, trends, challenges”



Also, the study “NGO Leaders Barometer” conducted by CSDF in 2010, shows that in the last two years 52.7% of the NGOs interviewed have not made any proposal to amend the local / national decisions.



All these data show that the NGOs still have an insufficient knowledge about what means to develop and maintain a structured dialogue with the state actors.

The second cause identified is the existence of inefficient consultation mechanisms between public authorities and the organized civil society (e.g. roundtables, debates, seminars, etc.).

2. Solution Approach

In this context, the European Institute for Participatory Democracy Qvorum in partnership with IRENE proposed a complex set of measures to solve the identified problems aiming to strengthening the capacity of non-governmental organizations to cooperate structured and efficient with the public administration institutions.

The “Efficient mechanisms of cooperation with public authorities” project that has been implemented in December 2012 – December 2013 in 4 regions of Romania: Bucharest-Ilfov, South -West, North-East and Centre.

In order to reach the proposed goal, there have been delivered and facilitated a series of theoretical and practical training courses, roundtable discussions and study-visits. Through this manner it has been encouraged and practiced the structured dialog on public agenda issues between the representatives of the local and national authorities and the active citizens.

The target group in the project consisted of members from the civil society (citizens, NGOs, stake holders) and also, civil servants and contractual personnel of public institutions.

The training programs have been held in each region and provided theoretical and practical information about the institutional structure of the local and national public administration, inter-institutional relationships, legislative processes and public policy drafting, the participatory democracy, the role of civil society and ways of influencing the public policies. A total of 138 participants have been trained on the topic of public administration institutions` system and the active participation of the civil society to the decision-making process.

Project region	South - West	Centre	North – East	Bucharest - Ilfov
Place	Craiova	Sibiu	Bacău	București
Participants' number	45	28	35	30

At the end of each training session it has been organized a debate - “Ideas` laboratory for your city!” – between the representatives of the local authorities and participants of the training sessions. These activities aimed to gather at the same table of discussion the civil society, NGOs and other stake holders and the representatives of the public administration.

The main topics approached during these events have been about:

1. the renewal of the auto garage of the Craiova`s public transportation system;
2. the modernization of the Craiova`s Zoo;
3. the advantages and disadvantages for Sibiu – regional capital;
4. the modernization of the public library infrastructure- which will be equipped with new generation computers and modern equipment for public internet access;
5. the urban bicycle tourism and the need of a bicycle track network;
6. parks under microscope- a proposal for a systematization of the park from Polytechnic;
7. green Gardens on the top of the Bucharest`s buildings.

The participants that showed great interest in the trainings` topics and who have been most active were invited to attend the study visits organized in Brussels and Milan. The study visits consisted in working meetings at:

- The European Commission, The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee, The European Regions Committee, NGO-s, think-tank-s: VoteWatch Europe, European Youth Forum, European Policy Centre, Centre for European Studies – **in Brussels**.

- Regional Council in Lombardia, Agenzia Formazione Orientamento Lavoro Provincia Milano – AFOL, Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale – IRS, NGO-s: Asociation IRENE, Fondazione Lombardia Per L’Ambiente, Coordinamento Delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario – COSV, Legambiente - **in Milan**.

The purpose of the visits was for the participants to see in practice how the EU institutions work and how is conducted the decision-making process. Also, meetings were organized with NGOs representatives who have long experience in cooperation with public institutions from either European level or national level (Italy and Romania). Thus, 20 participants have assimilated advanced knowledge on good practices of cooperation between public authorities and civil society at European level.

After establishing a basic level on the topic of public administration institutions` system and the active participation of the civil society to the decision-making process, the participants were encouraged to focus on finding applicable solutions for a local problem in their communities. The objective was to engage the civic society in a structured dialogue together with the decision makers at local level on concrete local issues and to set up a debate platform for all those willing to take action and to express their opinion for solving the local problems.

As a result, the participants from Craiova and Sibiu have managed to initiate two local citizens` initiatives on local public administration matters that have been brought into the public attention of the decision-making actors:

- Sibiu Working Group advocates and lobby for the reconfiguration of the public transport routes assured by S.C. Tursib S.A., Sibiu county;
- Craiova Working Group advocates and lobby for the historical cultural heritage rehabilitation.

3. Conclusion

The role and the participation of civil society in the public policies development is starting to be recognized as an important and efficient mechanism to improve the policy making process. Based on the experience accumulated, we consider highly necessary to encourage and to practice the structured dialog between decision-making actors and the civil society (citizens, NGOs, stake holders).

Main outputs of the project “Efficient mechanisms of cooperation with public authorities”:

- 4 training sessions on the topic of public administration institutions` system and the active participation of the civil society to the decision-making process - number of participants: 138;
- 4 round tables - “Ideas` laboratories for your city!” – Debates between the representatives of the local authorities and participants of the training sessions;
- 1 public debate organized with representatives of the central public administration in Bucharest - The NGOs` consultation within both national and European decision-making process;
- 1 Study Visit in Brussels for 10 participants;
- Best practices sharing in Milan for 10 participants;
- 1 seminar on Sustainable development of the communities;
- 1 seminar on Gender and Equal opportunities;
- 1 Guide of good practices concerning the cooperation methods between the civil society and the public administration institutions;
- 2 successful partnerships of the organized citizens and public authorities on local administrative issues.

4. References

European Institute for Participatory Democracy – Qvorum, “*Efficient mechanisms of cooperation with public authorities*” project.

Civil Society Development Foundation (2010). “*Romania in 2010. Nongovernmental sector. Profile, trends, challenges*”.

Civil Society Development Foundation (2010). “*NGO Leaders Barometer*”.