



CSOs FOR MAKING
LOCAL DEMOCRACY WORK

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Conclusions and Recommendations

FORUM FOR EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICES

PARTNERSHIP AS KEY FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Rethinking the cooperation between
local authorities and civil society

Skopje, North Macedonia
11-12 June 2019

Introduction

The Forum for exchange of good practices “PARTNERSHIP as KEY for LOCAL DEMOCRACY: Rethinking the cooperation between local authorities and civil society” took place on the 11th -12th June 2019 in Skopje, North Macedonia.

This international event gathered more than 90 representatives of local authorities, civil society and international organizations from the Balkans and the EU. Through 4 panels, series of discussions and debates the participants had opportunity to exchange best practices, share their experiences and discuss new ways of cooperation between local authorities and the civil sector.

The experts from the Balkan region talked about the similar situations and experience in the countries of the region and the speakers coming from the EU talked how they overcame certain challenges in the process of integration and while implementing local democracy activities in their communities.

The aim of this document is to present the key messages from the speakers and the overall conclusions and recommendation that resulted from the discussions and the presentations.

The forum was organized in the framework of the project “CSO’s for making local democracy work” implemented by the European Association for Local democracy – ALDA Skopje, Association of Finance Officers of the Local Governments – AFO and The European Movement from North Macedonia, supported by the European union and financed by the Central European Initiatives (CEI).



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Европско движење Северна Македонија
European Movement North Macedonia



Здружение на финансиски работници

на локалните самоуправи и јавните претпријатија

Association of Finance Officers
of the local governments and public enterprises

Opening session

The event was opened by Imislawa Gorska, ALDA Governing Board Member, Kiril Partalov, State secretary in the Ministry of Local Self-Government and moderated by Ivana Petrovska, director of ALDA Skopje.



Kiril Partalov,
State secretary
Ministry of Local Self-
Government

The Ministry of Local Self-Government has an important role in Macedonian communities and aims to promote local self-government in order to deliver quality of local services with European standards tailored to citizen's needs, sustainable local development and good governance at local level. The key message transmitted was concerning partnerships: Local partnerships built on international level establish very good practices and contribute to the openness of local governments.

After a short presentation of ALDA, created by the Council of Europe 20 years ago with aim to support regional cooperation and local democracy in Western Balkans, the experience of Poland before and after becoming member of the European Union was also presented. The process of European integration is not evident; democracy doesn't happen overnight. The partners from other countries need to share experiences and move forward.



Imislawa Gorska,
ALDA Governing
Board Member

The intervention begins with a presentation of the forum, the project "CSOs for making local democracy work" and some of the ALDA Skopje experience on local democracy. Partnership is indispensable, individually none of the local stakeholders can do any change.



Ivana Petrovska,
Director ALDA
Skopje

PANEL I

Towards more effective partnership with civil society

The aim of the first panel was to find the answers to the following questions:

- How does civil society participate in the process of creation and implementation of public policies on local level?
- How involved are different stakeholders in decision-making on local level?
- How to enable long-lasting and sustainable partnership with civil society?



Moderated by Ivan Vejvoda,
Center for Democracy Foundation Serbia

CNOVS does an important work for mediation between municipalities and civil society organisations in Slovenia. In that work, constant communication is the key. Direct participation of citizens on local level takes time to accommodate, get use to the system and then contribute. By giving citizens space to develop their ideas, you increase their feeling of ownership.



Monika Kostanjevec
CNOVOS, Slovenia

The National Convent of the EU in Serbia has an important role in the EU accession process of Serbia, and the best practices are numerous. Why civil society organizations are included in the process? It is important the CSO are involved in the process of EU accession because they represent the link with the citizens. The EU accession is decision of the people, given on a referendum.



Natasha Dragojlovic
National Convent of EU
in Serbia

A different point a view, from the local authority itself. The experience of the Municipality of Kumanovo in creating partnerships with CSOs is big and developing. A local authority needs to stay open for dialogue with the civil sector.



Goran Mitevski
Municipality of Kumanovo

Many good practices for cooperation between the City of Uzice with the civil society organizations were shared. It has proven to be successful for a local authority to work together with the civil society in preparation of projects. The cooperation with the business sector is also of crucial importance.



Aleksandar Tasic
City of Uzice, Serbia

PANEL II

Is it all about the money? Support to civil society organizations: what is it all about and why

The aim of the second panel was to find the answers to the following questions

- How are local authorities supporting the activities of civil society organizations?
- What is the enabling environment for civil society on local level?
- Is a true partnership defined only by financial support?



**Moderated by Mileva Gjurovska,
European Movement of North Macedonia**

The intervention began with a presentation of the research "Financial and non-financial support to CSOs from local authorities". The presented results suggest that even though a great number of local authorities cooperate with their local CSOs, the process is rarely transparent and needs much improvement. The key message from the presentation was that not only can local authorities offer services to CSOs but also vice versa. Because the partnership between local authorities and CSOs it is an inclusive partnership process with a leading idea of the future.



**Zoran Jankulovski
Association of Finance
Officers of the Local
Governments**



**Samir Omerefendic
ReLOaD, Bosnia and
Herzegovina**

The project ReLOaD aims to strengthen partnership between central government, local government and CSOs by scaling up a successful model for project-based funding and talking the way how transparently local governments should allocate funding for CSOs. There is a lack of transparency of public funding processes in all Balkan countries. While creating a model for project funding one important fact has surfaced, one size doesn't fit all. Not all measures fit all entities. It's up to local authorities and CSOs to work together to improve cooperation and create relevant approaches.

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To better the cooperation between the local authorities and civil society, the Kujawian-Pomeranian Region created an office for cooperation with NGOs and its main task is to coordinate activities in the scope of cooperation with non-governmental organisations. Some of the best practices that can be implemented in other countries as an integrated reporting system, internet portals and a possibility given each tax payer to transfer 1% of his personal tax to a public benefit organisation of his choice.



**Sławomir Kopyś,
Kujawian-Pomeranian
Region in Poland**



**Emir Coric,
Centar Municipality**

Serious partnership requires full inclusion of CSO's in the work of municipalities and their full involvement in decision-making processes. The cooperation of the Municipality of Centar with the civil sector is on all levels, from involving them in different procedures of decision making, creating policies and by financial and non-financial aid that the municipality of Centar offers to its citizens. Transparency is key for good partnership between the civil society and the local authority.

PANEL III:

Reimagining citizen participation: digital technology vs. paperwork

The questions to be answered by the third panel were:

- Do we need to institutionalize new digital forms of citizen participation?
- E-participation as tool to support digital democracy on local level
- How to adopt digital participatory practices in setting priorities and budgeting?



**Moderated by Stanka Parac- Damjanovic,
LDA Subotica, Serbia**



**Miso Dokmanovic
ISIE**

ISIE implements several projects that incorporate different digital approaches in securing the interests of the public like the internet page referendum.mk where citizens can inform themselves what is a referendum and their role in deciding their future by voting. The shared key message was that local authorities need to rethink the communication channels with the constituents, as using social medias, internet portals and apps.

One of the main tasks of the LDA Mostar is to reimagine the citizen participation in her city. Taking into consideration the political, social and economic status in Mostar, the Local Democracy Agency is driven to use innovative tools and methods to ensure citizens' participation. As the paperwork doesn't work, the LDA creates different digital tools and activities aimed to the general public of the city. The city of Mostar hasn't had public voting since 2012, so in the framework of the activity "ELECT Mostar", elections were organized with the help of the volunteers from the city, and the citizens could cast their ballot and express their opinions on the situations.



**Dzenana Dedic
LDA Mostar, BiH**

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*Moderated by Stanka Parac- Damjanovic,
LDA Subotica, Serbia*



Jasmina Trajkoska
FON University
Skopje

The role of the citizens in the community is crucial. When there is a common issue and idea it will be always supported by all citizens. A simple referendum about communal services in a municipality will be more successful than a referendum on national level. Citizens need to talk about deliberative democracy, which involves talking about problems, debating at the micro level, because that is where the needs and the issues/challenges of the community are, there is what citizens need to organize socially in order to be able to make their lives easier on a daily basis.

When talking about using new technologies to benefit citizens, it is important to see digitalization and new technologies from a citizen centric approach. Digital technologies will help to improve the transparency of the local authorities and be more open to the needs of citizens. The lack of promotion of already implemented digital tools is alarming as all tools and services need to be accessible to all citizens. Digital technology should be in favor of improving relations between authorities with citizens, businesses and so on. But, if digital technology doesn't contribute to making these relationships more efficient and a better fit, it's important to find another tool.



Bardhyl Jashari,
Metamorphosis
Foundation

PANEL IV

International cooperation towards strengthened local partnerships



Moderated by Elbert Krasniqi,
LDA Kosovo

The forth panel posed the following questions:

- How are the EU projects supporting the partnerships on local level?
- Decentralised cooperation as means for mobilisation of local stakeholders

The Municipality of Trentino, for almost 25 years invests part of the budget in international cooperation. By using the method of decentralised completion the municipality started the programme with the Balkans and they have open the Association “Trentino con i Balcani” that became a hub for Italian and Balkan actors that want to cooperate. In international or decentralised cooperation, it is important to create common language with other counties, as the countries have different procedures, laws and habits.



Maurizio Camin
“Trentino con i
Balcani”, Italy



Emmanuel Rimbart
French Embassy in
Skopje

The decentralisation is an important process in the development not only of France, but all the countries that France cooperates with, like the programme for decentralized cooperation between Normandy and North Macedonia. The citizens have to want to work together and in decentralized cooperation this is seen in a significant way. Cooperation is a challenge but civil society is already proving that it can be effective.

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International cooperation towards strengthened local partnerships

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- How are the EU projects supporting the partnerships on local level?
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The work that the LDA's do in their local communities is very important and it builds bridges between our local communities with the local communities in the European Union. The main benefit of the LDA programme for the local communities is to have this representation of international partners on local level and for this communication is key. The main challenge is convincing the local authorities that international cooperation is important for them, since for them priority is funds for infrastructure.



Sasa Marinkov
LDA Central and
South Serbia



Lovren Markic
City of Skopje

The City of Skopje created a strategy for cooperation with civil society that is highly beneficial for both, the Sector and the citizens. The municipal administration is very rigid, but these types of cooperation are the way to overcome challenges. When the municipal administration is directly involved with the implementation of European projects with the civil society, it understands and appreciates the benefits this brings both to their professional expertise, as well as to the community.

Closing intervention

Strengthening the role of civil society organizations and local authorities in development process - **Antonella Valmorbida**



**Antonella
Valmorbida**
**General Secretary
of ALDA**

The core of ALDA and also its added value, the animation of civil society focused on how to interact with local authorities and how to make them productive. The results of this activities are evidences that this cooperation can create cohesive governance in one community, which implies an active and open local authority and constructive civil society. This is very much connected to the capacities of local authorities to be engaged in activities outside their normal administrative duties, as in European projects and international cooperation. A local authority that opens its doors to civil society is a local authority ready to mount, think and create projects and initiatives on local level.

There are new tendencies in politics and democracy which creates uncertain future for all sectors. The confusing lines of parties, fluctuations and multiplication of stakeholders and lack of permanent representation are the new realities citizens are facing. Civil society is becoming more organized and have a big capacity for governance. So civil society needs a change and needs to be more constructive, as it is no more just a beneficiary of the policies, but a piece of construction of the policies. We need to learn to live in this new reality, not to be overwhelmed and to create new solutions and policies.

Our task is to prepare the local authorities for this new reality in order to make them more flexible and responsive, to think about projects and other resources. It is important to prepare citizens. We don't need citizens that only complain, but citizens that propose, that are constructive, alert and informed. This is the right place to start practicing the participative democracy, which is a constant interaction between citizens and local authorities. As the local authorities are usually clueless about the local reality, is up to the citizens to inform them and to create relevant policies with them".

The objective of all discussions and presentations of this conference was to open up minds, learn from experience and create together, as well as to be prepared for this new realty. The Civil society can't be passive and wait for the change to happen, it needs to be active and bring the change.

Conclusions

- Exchange of experiences is important for learning from each other.
- Involvement of citizens in local community affairs takes time, they need to accommodate and learn the system. But, by giving them space to share ideas, they feel the ownership.
- It is important the CSOs are involved in the process of EU accession because they represent the link with the citizens. The EU accession is decision of the people, given on referendum.
- Not only can local authorities offer services to CSOs but also vice versa. Because the partnership between local authorities and CSOs it is an inclusive partnership process.
- Transparency in the work of both CSOs and LAs is key for mutual development and successful partnership.
- One size doesn't fit all, although a successful general model is needed, is up to the local authorities and their civil sector to create a tailor made model that fits their necessities following the general rules.
- Local authorities need to rethink the communication channels with the constituents, to use different media outlets and internet portals or social media.
- Digital technology should be in favor of improving relations between authorities with citizens, with businesses and so on. But, if digital technology doesn't contribute to making those relationships more efficient and a better fit, it's important to find another tool.
- The community needs education of the culture of participation for citizens as well as decision makers.
- Very important to include youth modernisation and digitalisation helps young people understand the local environment better and motivates them to contribute more to the local level.
- Cooperation between local authorities and civil society is a way to overcome common challenges.
- Main challenge is convincing the local authorities that international cooperation is important for them, since for them priority is funds for infrastructure.

Conclusions

- When the municipal administration is directly involved with the implementation of these European projects with the civil society understands and appreciates the benefits it brings both to their professional expertise as well as to the community.
- In the cooperation between LAs and CSOs, the issues that arise are part of a misunderstanding on the part of the municipality not knowing how CSOs function and vice versa. It's important for both parties to be better acquainted.
- In international or decentralised cooperation, it is important to create common language with other counties, as the countries have different procedures, laws and habits.
- Today, civil society is not just a beneficiary of the policies, but a peace of construction of the policies, so it needs to change and become more constructive.
- It is up to civil society and citizens to prepare the local authorities for changes in society in order to make them more flexible and responsive.
- The Civil society can't passively wait for the change to happen, it needs to be active and bring the change.



The contents of this publication are entirely the responsibility of ALDA Skopje and do not necessarily reflect the views and positions of the European Union.



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