



ICNL REPORT:
**STUDY TOUR ON LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR
NGO/LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS**

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Dates of trip: June 30 – July 11, 2002

Participants: Representatives from Macedonian Citizen Information Centers, NGOs and the DAI/Local Government Reform Project.

Local Partner Organizers: Poland: Mr. Michal Guc, Deputy Mayor of Gdynia and Mr. Wojciech Girucki, Chief, Center for NGOs, Gdynia; Croatia: Ms. Cvjetana Plavska-Matic, Head of the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs and Ms. Marija Boltek, Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs, Zagreb.

Partnership between the local government and NGOs in Macedonia takes various forms. First, there exist 13 Citizen Information Centers (CICs), which are part of the local government. Second, there is an Information Service for NGOs and citizens, which functions within the local government, but is operated by an NGO. In addition, some cities employ a representative from a local NGO to serve as a Counselor to the Mayor on a specific issue (e.g. environment). The CICs are focused more on communication between the two sectors, and less on promoting NGOs as social service providers. The other two forms of cooperation seek to integrate NGOs into their work, but lack sustainability and need to be further institutionalized.

With the goal of presenting innovative institutional practices relating to NGO/local government cooperation to representatives of the above-mentioned Macedonian organizations, ICNL organized a study tour on the Legal and Institutional Framework for NGO/Local Government Partnerships. The study tour also aimed to expose the participants to additional means of fulfilling their informational and ombudsmen functions, to market their services more effectively, and to serve as a communication point between local government and NGOs. In addition, the study tour addressed organizational development issues, including staffing issues and resource mobilization.

The study tour took place from June 30 to July 11, 2002. ICNL invited 5 representatives from the CICs and 3 representatives from NGOs that have initiated cooperation with the local government. ICNL also hosted Ms. Vesna Atanasova from the DAI/Local Government Reform Project, who, as coordinator of the CICs, nominated the participants. Represented on the tour were CICs from the following cities: Bitola, Gostivar, Kumanovo, Veles and Stip. The NGO representatives were selected in collaboration with Mr. Zoran Stojkovski of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC). Representatives from the following NGOs attended the tour: Center for Civic Initiatives ("CCI"), Prilep, Environmental Organization – "Sunrise", Sv. Nikole and Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, Kavadarci.

SUMMARY OF THE MEETINGS

I. POLAND

Poland offers one of the most impressive examples of NGO-local government partnership in Central and Eastern Europe, as there have been established sustainable systems of NGO/Local government cooperation, which have successfully led to benefits for the local community. Through this part of the study tour, participants studied examples of an institutionalized system of cooperation, which serves citizens and integrates the NGOs. The bulk of the study tour took place in Gdynia, which is notable for being the first city in Poland to undertake such an initiative for cooperation and to successfully manage to include NGOs in the system of city management. After receiving an overview of the Polish NGO sector, participants focused on two primary issues related to NGO-government partnership: (1) people and institutions facilitating cooperation between NGOs and local government and (2) NGOs as service providers. The participants were hosted by Mr. Michal Guc, Deputy Mayor of Gdynia and initiator of this cooperation, and Mr. Wojcieck Girucki, Chief of the Center for NGOs in Gdynia.

1. Overview of the Polish NGO Sector

The tour began with a general overview of the Polish NGO sector. Mr. Kuba Wagnanski, one of the key players in the NGO sector, presented the famous KLON/JAWOR database of Polish NGOs, Polish and international donors, and cooperating international NGOs. He also revealed the results of his organization's research compiling basic data about the NGO sector, with particular emphasis on the sustainability of NGOs working in the social sphere. From this presentation, participants learned of possible ways to organize the database of information for the NGOs in their community and how to facilitate the exchange of information about the sector. Finally, Ms. Ana Wojakowska of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation assessed the situation in Poland from a donor's perspective. Participants learned about the project "Transition in the region" (RITA), which is a potential source of financial support for the development of cooperation between Macedonian and Polish organizations, especially related to the issues of cross-sectoral cooperation.

2. People and Institutions Facilitating Cooperation between NGOs and Local Government

Participants visited the **Citizen Advise Bureau (CAB)** in Warsaw, where they were introduced to the concept of CABs, which are led by local NGOs and serve as a focal point of communication between citizens and local government. The participants were especially interested in the training on the basic principles for work with clients, which is being conducted by all CABs in Poland. In addition, they also saw samples of "client forms" and learned how to maintain a database of client information. Participants expressed interest in implementing these particular components upon their return to Macedonia.

Through a joint meeting with the representatives from the CABs in Gdynia and Gdansk, participants received a comparative perspective of cooperation, which provoked lively discussion. Ms. Anna Plosaj, from the CAB in Gdynia, explained the functioning of CABs that have successfully developed cooperation with the local government. She emphasized the services that are available to citizens, the process of providing advice and the training for volunteers who work with clients. She highlighted the forms of support CABs are receiving from the local government and how they are marketing their services, which should prove especially helpful to the CIC participants to further develop their informational and ombudsman functions. The participants were particularly interested in the sources of financial support that CABs are receiving from the local government and in how to mobilize resources from other sources.

In contrast to these two examples of successful CABs, participants met with Ms. Tamara Wolodzko, from the Gdansk CAB, which is still struggling to build cooperation with the local government. Ms. Wolodzko explained the efforts being made to overcome the barriers to cooperation and to gain the trust of the local government. She noted that the Gdansk CAB is being operated by volunteers. Her enthusiasm helped the NGO participants to identify some common problems and discuss possible solutions. One of the CIC participants noted: *“The meetings enabled us to see that these organizations had problems similar to ours, before they have reached this level of cooperation. This helped us learn that well prepared and sustainable projects that serve the common good - are the best argument for achieving easier communication with the local government”*. Later in the tour, the participants also visited the offices of the CAB in Gdansk. Their one complaint was that they were not able to stay longer in these centers and attend some of the meetings with the clients.

In Gdynia, participants studied a second form of institutionalized cooperation: **Centers for NGOs**, which are established by, and operating in cooperation with, the local government. Mr. Michal Guc, Deputy Mayor of Gdynia, outlined the partnership from the perspective of the local government and explained the rationale behind the Centers, and the scheme of their functioning. Mr. Wojciech Girucki, Chief of the Center for NGOs, explained the type of services that the local government is providing through these Centers to local NGOs. He particularly emphasized the role of providing free-of-charge space for NGOs to support some of their activities and explained the format of the meetings organized for facilitating discussions between the local government and NGOs. Participants were interested to hear how these Centers facilitate the process of grant giving. Finally, Mr. Kazimierz Bukartyk, the Plenipotentiary of Mayor of Gliwice on NGO issues, described his efforts to implement the Gdynia model in his city. The participants found some of the examples very useful in terms of strengthening their role as facilitators of the local government's financial support to NGOs and in terms of fostering dialogue between the two sectors.

The CABs and the Centers for NGOs gave participants two models of NGO-local government cooperation, which provide useful reference points in evaluating their own activities. During the debriefing sessions, the CIC participants discussed the possibility

of either expanding the responsibilities of the current CICs and/or establishing new Centers for NGOs, which could be facilitated by the existing CIC. Even more importantly, the participants were able to clarify how these Centers have maintained their independence, although they are operating within or in close cooperation with the local government. One of the participants said that she was *“most impressed by the determination of these organizations to develop the activities in line with their aims, while at the same time to be seriously accepted by the local government and to strive to keep their independent functioning.”* This is among the greatest challenges faced by the actors of the cooperation in Macedonia.

2. NGOs as Service Providers

Participants also met with NGOs providing social services in place of the local government. They visited the shelters for homeless people and centers for mentally handicapped people, which are run by local NGOs with the financial and in-kind support of the local government. During these visits, participants learned how the local authorities are transferring responsibility to the NGOs and about the forms of support they are providing to them. While examples of such cooperation exist in Macedonia, there is a need to further recognize and institutionalize such cooperation. Participants agreed on the importance of fostering a more frequent dialogue between the local government and the NGOs, with the aim of enabling better understanding of their work and receiving feedback from the community. This could also result in a better understanding of community needs and preparation of a joint strategy for responding to those needs.

In a meeting at the Economic Foundation, participants learned of the Foundation's work on economic development in Gdynia. The Foundation is running a program for unemployed people, who receive financial support from the local government. In cooperation with the local government and corporate sector, the Foundation organizes a fair for job opportunities. Some participants expressed interest in carrying out such a project in their communities, especially since unemployment is currently a big problem in Macedonia.

The tour in Poland also highlighted the mutual benefit that springs from engaging volunteers in the field. The participants recognized that the number of volunteers in the centers and organizations they visited was usually larger than the number of employees.

II. CROATIA

Like Poland, Croatia offers impressive examples of NGO/local government cooperation. Unlike Poland, Croatia has not developed the same level of institutionalized cooperation at the local level. Instead, in Croatia, the national government has established a National Office for Cooperation with NGOs, while at the local level, more informal forms of cooperation are being developed, through the initiative of the NGO sector. The tour in Croatia mainly focused on the issues of developing programs for

cooperation on national and local level, local government grant giving to NGOs, the development of the role of NGOs as social service providers and the importance of volunteers. The tour was hosted by ICNL's long-standing partners, Ms. Cvjetana Plavs-Matic and Ms. Marija Boltek, from the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs.

1. Developing Programs for Cooperation

Participants met with Ms. Cvjetana Plavs-Matic, Head of the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs, and three representatives of the regional resource centers in Croatia. These sessions enabled them to compare the development of NGO/government cooperation on the national and local level. Ms. Plavs-Matic discussed the reasons for establishing, and the process of establishing the Government Office for NGOs. She gave a systematic presentation concerning how the National Program for Cooperation had been developed and outlined the basic principles on which this Program depends. She also described the Croatian experience of developing cooperation on the national and local levels and the continuing challenges. The participants recognized similar challenges in Macedonia and considered potential solutions.

In addition, participants learned how the Croatian government sets the criteria for financing NGOs from the state budget and how the selection process has been implemented. Particularly interesting was the recent creation of a Commission for review of grant applications, which on the national level is composed of representatives of both the government and NGOs. Ms. Plavs-Matic emphasized the principles of transparency and accountability, which are fundamental to the development of a solid, trusting partnership.

In complement to Ms Plavs-Matic's presentation, Ms. Sandra Kolonic-Bisticic, of the Ri-Center (Regional Resource Center in Rijeka), spoke on developing a Charter of Cooperation at the local level. She explained the process of forming a regional network of NGOs in Rijeka, and also detailed the strategy of presenting the proposal to the local government. Most participants found these presentations useful and expressed an interest in developing such programs for cooperation in their local communities. In addition, they decided to inform a representative from the Macedonian Ministry of Local Government about the potential initiatives that could be developed on a national level in Macedonia.

2. Local Government Grant Giving to NGOs Which Are Providing Services to the Community

Vesna Zec, Head of the Local Government Office for Social Welfare, and key to the developing cooperation in Split, compared the previous and current framework for transferring responsibilities from the local government to NGOs. In addition, she explained the criteria for receiving financial support from the local government for projects in the field of delivering social services and for issues that the local government has listed as important for the community (e.g., the promotion and support of

volunteerism in the community). She also stressed the importance of cooperation within the local NGO sector as a prerequisite for successful and trustworthy cooperation with the local government.

Participants also met with NGOs that are direct partners with the local government. This part of the tour proved particularly interesting for the NGO participants, because they were able to exchange experience with organizations that work in the same fields (e.g. environmental protection and juvenile delinquency). These meetings offered a different perspective from those in Poland, because the form of cooperation is not as institutionalized as in Poland. The participants met also with activists who are performing their services on voluntary basis. The enthusiasm and experience of these volunteers underscored the importance of volunteers in the sector and motivated the participants to develop programs for engaging volunteers in their local communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

A fundamental benefit of the study tour was that participants were exposed to a variety of methods of promoting cooperation between local governments and NGOs. According to one participant, the tour allowed them to witness a “*rich palette of forms of cooperation*” and meet the key players responsible for that cooperation. Another commented that “*the tour has opened new perspectives for cooperation in the field*” which would be interesting to implement in their home cities. Significantly, the tour also enabled participants to exchange experience among themselves and to recognize the diversity of partnerships that exist in Macedonia.

ICNL is pleased that the tour demonstrated realistic mechanisms for NGO-government cooperation, not only to the participants, but also to Ms. Atanasova, who, as coordinator of the CICs, will be working on their future development. We recognize that five of eight participants are most eager and interested in undertaking immediate follow-up activities. The most enthusiastic representatives are evidently those from the NGOs, especially from “CCI” and “Sunrise”, and the representatives from the CICs in Kumanovo and Gostivar.

Throughout the tour, ICNL held five planning sessions, which were led primarily by Mr. Guc and Ms. Plavska-Matic. During these sessions, participants reflected upon the issues raised at the meetings and began to develop a strategy for follow-up activities. Their concrete ideas include:

- A meeting through which study-tour participants could share their newly gained expertise with other CIC and NGO representatives, and with government representatives (such as the Ministry of Local Government and the Association of Units of Local Government);
- Small workshops designed to further understanding of the partnership possibilities in some local communities and to convey specific experiences of the study tour to their local contacts;

- Trainings designed to build the capacity of the participants and their colleagues in the field of partnership;
- Setting up Centers for NGOs;
- Developing criteria for grant making from the local government;
- Developing Programs for cooperation between local government and NGOs

Upon their own initiative, all participants are currently working on an internal report on the study tour, which should help them to summarize the tour findings and elaborate plans for individual entities. This process is being facilitated by ICNL, with the assistance of Ms. Atanasova. In addition, they are preparing individual presentations about the tour for their colleagues and local NGOs, at which time they plan to seek their input in drafting a more concrete plan for the development of cooperation.

ICNL will remain engaged to facilitate cross-border exchange of experience between our Polish and Croatian local partners and the study tour participants. ICNL also stands ready to assist in preparing legal documents and procedures related to partnership activities. ICNL will likewise support efforts to strengthen and develop a network of volunteers in the local community.

We are aware that the implementation of follow-up activities will depend on the openness of the local government in each city as well as on the ability of the participants to translate the experience gained on the tour into meaningful action. This was implicitly recognized by one of the participants, who stressed that: *“...the experience in Poland and Croatia taught us also that in order to accomplish our aims we need time and enthusiasm”*.

Potential barriers to effective partnership include the uncertain legal environment in which the Centers must operate and the lack of financial support. The Macedonian Parliament recently enacted a new Law on Local Self-government, which will require a thorough analysis as to the legal possibilities for the development of cooperation. Even given a favorable framework for partnership, financial restraints will make the implementation process difficult. The draft Law on Public Financing, if enacted, will likely provide more financial resources to the local government, providing greater opportunity for the development of partnership activities. Finally, the NGOs need to “convince” the local government about the need to further institutionalize methods of cooperation.

Considering the above-mentioned obstacles, ICNL recognizes the need for further discussions with the participants on the best approach for conceptualizing and implementing these follow-up activities. ICNL will be happy to combine efforts with LGRP and ISC and seek their input, as the next steps are determined. We hope that this cooperation will provide for a better assessment of the needs of the local communities and more effective response to those needs. ICNL of course welcomes USAID’s thoughts on how to ensure effective implementation of these initiatives.

At the end of the study tour, one participant noted that “*all the models of cooperation we have seen have been established with the aim to accomplish goals that are for the common good of the community as a whole*”. This is the basic message the tour hoped to convey.

As always, ICNL expresses its appreciation to Kathy Stermer and Melita Cokrevska, USAID/Skopje for their guidance and support in organizing this tour, and we look forward to our continued work together in the development of this field in Macedonia.