

EVALUATION OF THE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF ACTORS WITHIN PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

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This paper focuses on measuring the capacity development within the participatory planning process of formulation of development strategy. It starts with the discussion of how individual, collaborative and governance capacities became a part of collaborative and consensus planning, and continues with proposing the mixed method approach. Quantitative methods have been used to measure the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction that participatory approach had on the actors. Evaluation has shown significant increase in actors' capacities during the planning process. Qualitative methods aim to reach understanding of the actors' perception of the results of the participatory planning process they were engaged in. Local actors recognized results as the following: opportunity for gaining a new knowledge, understanding of problems, importance of information and cooperation exchange, recognition of 'others', capability for evaluation of plans, understanding of different roles and responsibilities, importance of team work and bundling of knowledge from different sources in problem solving, and collective action and interaction. Thus, the participatory planning holds potential as a continual process of developing the capacities of actors.

Key words: capacity development of actors, participatory planning, mixed method approach.

INTRODUCTION

One of the first examples of the participatory planning in Serbia is the City of Niš Development Strategy (plan). The planning process was carried out under the SIRP UN-HABITAT Programme in 2007/08. This process served as a practice case study for measuring development of participants' capacities. Capacity development was monitored on a selected group of actors. It was analyzed based on the assessment of the training and workshops, and later through the actors' statements.

Why do we pay attention to capacity development? Since 2000 a huge number of aid programs were implemented in Serbia, and most of them with the main goal to foster capacity development. Except a small number, the majority of the planning professionals were excluded from these initiatives. Almost 10 years later, Vujošević (2010) finds the overall situation characterized by the 'lack of policies, necessity to renew the collapsed strategic thinking, research and governance and to introduce new development policy approach'.

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With this in mind, this paper represents an effort to answer some of the opened research questions within the field of the actors' capacity development in the participatory planning process.

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING APPROACH

Collaborative planning/governance has adopted the planning approach which emphasizes learning, interdependency of actions, as well as the relation between short-term and long-term effects (Healey, 1997). In its ideal form it is realized through the application of strategic planning characterized by participation. As Vujošević (2004) puts it, participatory planning is 'based on the principles of balanced division of governance and planning power, decentralization and subsidiarity'.

Participatory planning process is a process where planners, politicians, administration and public mutually learn. Within the given environment, a value system of an individual evolves as a social construct – it is formed through exchange, acceptance of other forms of knowledge, types of experience and different ways of informing. One of the preconditions for

an effective participatory planning process is that participation cannot be introduced without prior capacity building of the actors through ensuring required level of understanding, knowledge and skills.

Forester (1999) finds participatory planning processes to transform and change relations and identity of the actors (through capacity development, changes in behavior and development of networks), problems and priorities, as well as perception of values and results of a planning process. Within the participatory process actors learn about each other. They change themselves and create new relations as the basis for their further mutual work. The final goal of the exchange and acceptance of ideas, knowledge and skills is to enable their practical application.

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The participatory planning process aims at feasible agreements, but there are also some other meaningful results which could be obtained – a planning process could have an impact on changes regarding actors and actions, establishment of new relations, new practice, new ideas. The promotion of participation aims at drawing attention to differences, understanding of the others and their possibilities in shared environment, where the agreement on common values is desirable (Forester, 1999). The changes manifested in the development of capacities and social relations are perceived as a result of learning. Participation leads to knowledge enhancement and as such represents an instrument of capacity development.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN PLANNING

The processes of socialization and communication in planning encourage participants to identify a subject of common interest, recognize positions of their own interest and interest of the others, define problems and goals, use and improve their knowledge, reflect and manage different proposals, create ideas how to turn the proposed solutions into practice (Healey, 1997). Capacity development of actors/institutions is considered – in addition to the behaviour changes and network development – as the most important effect of learning in participatory planning (Forester, 1999). The process of learning through capacity development affects the creation of new environment where the actors cooperate in a way in order to solve problems, prevent conflicts and act more effectively. At the same time, capacity development does not include only skills and practical experiences, but it covers broader domains that include new topics and ideas, as well as establishment of a governance culture (Healey, 2006).

Within the literature on the capacity building within planning, there is a significant interest in the dimensions of individual capacities (Forester, 1999; Argyris, Schon, 1996; Foster-Fishman *et al.*, 2001; Booher, Innes, 2004); institutional, collaborative, relational – also known as social – capacities (Healey, 2004; Innes, Booher, 2003) as well as capacities of a community to steer its development – governance capacities (Innes & Booher, 2003; Healey, 2007). However, it should be mentioned that the capacities should not be treated as an absolute, but as a relative quality (Innes, Booher, 2003).

Capacity development (of an individual, organization, institution or a governance system) through collaborative planning is possible to

Table 1. Capacity development through collaborative planning

Individual capacities	Collaborative (institutional) capacities	Governance capacities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – knowledge and ideas – skills – problem understanding – implication of actions – understanding of others – creative ideas – self-knowledge ability – cooperation skills – initiative skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – strengthening discussion capability – communication and cooperation establishment skills – conflict solving – respecting the others – planning – developing and evaluating plans – coalition building – understanding different roles and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – bundling of knowledge from different sources in problem solving and option management – collective action and interaction

Note: Adapted from Forester (1999), Healey (2004, 2007), Innes & Booher (2003, 2004)

achieve if an organized, innovative and adaptable environment is created (Innes & Booher, 2003). The precondition for that is to propose the ground rules of the collaborative planning processes, which include collaboration and dialogue between different actors and stakeholders, and implementation of collective actions that are in line with public interest issues and policies.

The paper presents an analysis of a case study on actors' capacity development within the participatory planning process. The intention was to isolate and measure the development of individual, collaborative and governance capacities. Individual capacities come first because capability of a system depends on the capacities of an individual with her/his knowledge and ideas, skills, problem understanding, action implication, understanding of others (and their interests) in a process which enables them to broaden their knowledge through collaboration. Collaborative capacities are being developed through collaborative planning where the enhancement of the capability for discussion helps addressing the conflict of interest. Collaborative capacities can be skills of individuals to develop new knowledge, but also the good communication skills, knowledge about possible conflicts, having the respect for others, understanding how to plan and evaluate programmes and plans, how to build coalitions, and how to understand different roles and responsibilities. Finally, governance capacities are characterized by collective action and interaction of different actors, using the knowledge and professional competence of all actors in problem solving or management of possible options.

MIXED METHOD APPROACH

The mixed method approach to data collection and analysis is applied, which aims to 'better connect research to the people being studied and to better help address their concerns'

(Sanford *et al.*, 2013). What this means is that the research is based on both deductive and inductive considerations. Deductive considerations relate to the theory of communicative rationality and are subjected to empirical scrutiny by being translated into operational terms (Bryman, 2012), in this case participatory planning. With this in mind, the research is directed towards investigating if and how the participative planning process affects the actors' capacity development. The findings should confirm or reject the given hypothesis and therefore deductive circle would be completed. However, the confirmation of the hypothesis does not completely fulfill the aim of this research which also seeks for the framework that could examine the extent and nature of the capacity development of actors. In other words, it also seeks for the qualitative enquiry of the relation capacity development – participatory planning. Therefore, in terms of the epistemological considerations, this research looks for both understandings and explanations which can be reached through mixed method approach (Sanford *et al.*, 2013).

Nevertheless, the critiques related to mixed method approach are concerned that oppositely different epistemological grounds cannot provide a study that responds to the criteria of social research. However, the goal of mixed method research is 'not to replace either of these approaches but rather to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both single research studies' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Quantitative methods in this research have been used to measure the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction that participatory approach had on the actors, as well as to address the nature of changes occurred as a result of the capacity development (or lack of development), while qualitative methods aim to reach understanding of the actors' perception of the results of the participatory planning process they were engaged with.

ACTORS

Capacity development within the process of developing the plan was followed in the group of actors which participated in the process. The sample consisted of about 30 participants i.e. those who were continuously and directly involved in the planning process – members of the Working Group, Working Team and Development Council. The Development Council was the project management board, consisting of representatives of political parties, city boroughs and NGOs. The Working Group consisted of representatives of the Mayor's office, local administration and public enterprises, the Economic Chamber, financial and banking sector, NGOs, media and public institutions, with the task to provide professional support. The members of the Working Team were professionals from the University of Niš and the City Planning Institute.

A wider group of important stakeholders was identified by the participants themselves. These included the representatives of public enterprises, small and medium enterprises, banks, professional associations, cultural and sport organizations, civic associations, distinguished individuals. They are not included in this analysis.

EVALUATION MODEL

The evaluation model was based on the application of principles aiming at collaborative capacities' adaptability assessment. The principles for assessment of collaborative capacities' adaptability enable evaluation of measurable and non-measurable effects. Those are usually achieved agreements, establishment of new relations and institutionalization of practice, rules and behaviours initiated in such processes (Innes & Booher, 2000, 2003). The overall criteria consist of the process and outcome criteria of collaborative planning. This research relies on the principles of the research of American planners J. E. Innes *et al.* (2006), who – on the basis of empirical research – proposed the framework for evaluation of collaborative planning. Subsuming their reflections, Innes & Booher (1999a) point out at the process and result (outcome) criteria of the collaborative-consensus planning. The following are considered as quality and important results of collaborative planning: achieving high quality agreements, better chances of their execution, measurable and non-measurable results, establishing the principle of inseparability between process and outcome of planning, learning and change.

The application of qualitative and quantitative indicators served to monitor changes in capacity

Table 2. Proposed model of indicators for capacity development evaluation

Quantitative indicators/output indicators	Qualitative indicators/outcome indicators	Qualitative indicators/impact indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – establishing new social structures / institutions (forums, networks, workshops) – number of actors directly participating in planning process – frequency / repetition of meetings and workshops – number of meeting participants – distribution of key conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – common values acceptance level – level of willingness of individuals to cooperate in the accomplishment of group tasks – new insights and exchange of new insights on problems – developing innovative strategies – changes in relations between the actors – building trust within the group – establishing mutual understanding – enhancing quality and quantity of the data used by participants – change of practice in participating organizations – new networks and relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – new values and communication standards – cooperation between organizations and representative groups

development. In this case, the quantitative indicators open the possibility to examine and measure certain parameters, but not a complete, in-depth understanding of complex social and individual behaviour changes characteristic for participatory process within the local context. When the goal is to define the quality and character of participation as well as the way it is used, this research uses qualitative indicators.

The contribution of participation is expressed within the following dimensions: consideration of the variety of interests, confirmation of and 'ownership' over the decisions made, enhanced effectiveness, understanding of issues, strengthening of capacities, better information flow, and more. The choice of indicators is based on the given dimensions. Within development programmes, the indicators are mainly used for monitoring and evaluation as: output, outcome and impact indicators (Čolić, 2009). The output indicators refer to the visible and externally recognizable results, while the outcome indicators represent a 'real proof that the process makes a difference' (Čolić *et al.*, 2014). The impact indicators, on the other hand, are in line with the long-term effect. Those indicators are presented in the Table 2.

The capacity development in the participatory planning process was analyzed on the basis of assessment of the training and teamwork in the workshops, assessment of capacity development (evaluation of changes) and statements of the participants.

Trainings and workshops

The learning process needs to be supported by the training and workshops that involve actors, as the possibility for the application is not preconditioned. In this chapter the assessment

of the trainings and teamwork in the workshops is presented. The statements of participants have informative role, and their main purpose is illustration and understanding of the process, but they are not subject of overall evaluation.

The training itself represents an initial point of change of behavior of the actors as well as the improvement of the capabilities to apply the knowledge. Preparatory trainings were performed on the topics of communication, conflict management and participatory planning (Čolić *et al.*, 2008:133). Comparison of the results points out at the most significant elements of the capacity development, which refer to the increase in the knowledge and skills, the level of understanding of matters and the level of the improvement at work.

Additionally, the first part of the workshops were specialised technical training sessions that contained the method to face each step of the process, which was then applied in participatory workshop (Čolić *et al.*, 2008:134). The specialised trainings included: SWOT analysis, territorial marketing, budgeting, prioritization, and the EU project formulation (Čolić *et al.*, 2008:122). The workshops were evaluated by the actors. They covered the topics of actor's perceptions of the level of understanding of the workshops, useful elements and inputs that might affect their current practice, their previous experience and skills, insights into the possibility to improve the participatory process, and more. The dimensions that were recognized as the most significant are: 'teamwork', 'presentation of different examples', 'practical assignments', 'practice as the way to learn', 'active participation', 'discussion and interaction of opinions', 'possibility for practical engagement with the new skills'.

Evaluation of the actors' capacity development

Evaluation of changes on the level of capacity development on two occasions provides the data through the following indicators: common values acceptance level; level of willingness of individuals to cooperate in the accomplishment of group tasks; increased knowledge and understanding of the process; new insights and exchange of new insights into problems; developing innovative strategies; changes in relations between the actors; building trust within the group; establishing mutual understanding; enhancing quality and quantity of the data used by participants; change of practice in participating organizations; new networks and relations; new values and communication standards; cooperation between organizations and representative groups.

In order to provide the validity of the comparative analysis the quantification of the participant's responses is presented as a numeration of alternatives (0, 1, 2, 3), but also in percentage form. This part of the research was conducted after the draft plan was made (after six months of working together with the actors), and then six months after the plan has been adopted. Table 3 provides an overview of the changes in attitudes of actors towards the given indicators.

Table 3 shows the following:

- An average value of increase in actors' capacities was marked with 73%;
- Analysis indicates the simultaneous importance of: Individual capacities – increased knowledge and understanding of the process (83%) and the level of willingness of individuals to cooperate in the accomplishment of group tasks (79%); Collaborative capacities – establishing mutual understanding (79%), common values acceptance level (78%) and the new values and communication standards establishing (78%); and Governance capacities – new networks and relations (72%) and cooperation between organizations and representative groups (72%);
- After the first evaluation the data has shown that the capacity development rates from 1.93 to 2.35, and the next evaluation has shown the different numeration of the categories. Increased knowledge and understanding of the process was marked with 2.48 (83%), and compared to the previous evaluation it increased by 10%. Changes in relations between the actors increased by 19%. Significant change represents the support for the developing innovative strategies, which increased by 18%. The highest rates are the level of willingness of individuals to cooperate

Table 3. Evaluation scale for the capacity development changes

Indicators/dimensions	19/07/2007.		28/05/2008.	
	a.m.	%	a.m.	%
common values acceptance level	2.32	77%	2.33	78%
level of willingness of individuals to cooperate in the accomplishment of group tasks	2.22	74%	2.37	79%
increased knowledge and understanding of the process	2.25	75%	2.48	83%
new insights and exchange of new insights into problems	1.93	64%	1.96	59%
developing innovative strategies	1.96	65%	2.29	76%
changes in relations between the actors	1.83	61%	2.14	72%
building trust within the group	1.96	65%	2.03	68%
establishing mutual understanding	1.86	62%	2.37	79%
enhancing quality and quantity of the data used by participants	2.35	78%	2.10	70%
change of practice in participating organizations	2.32	77%	1.96	65%
new networks and relations	2.12	70%	2.15	72%
new values and communication standards	2.12	70%	2.33	78%
cooperation between organizations and representative groups	2.12	70%	2.15	72%
				Average value 73%

in the accomplishment of group tasks (increased by 5%), establishing mutual understanding (increased by 22%) and common values acceptance level (increased by 10%). Building trust within the group, together with the changes in relations between the actors, represents the lowest marked dimension on the whole scale, increased by 5%. Final stages of the planning process show decrease in the dimension of the insights and exchange of new insights into problems from 64% to 59%, enhancing quality and quantity of the data used by participants from 78% to 70%, as well as the influence on change of practice in participating organizations from 77% to 65%. This was expected since the planning process was finished.

Although the numerical statements do not represent the absolute values, quantification has been used to measure the level of satisfaction that participatory approach had on the actors – its' increase and decrease, as well as to address the nature of changes that occurred.

Actors' statements

As part of the same survey the actors expressed their opinion on the way how they see the results of the participatory effort. The gained practical experience proved to be an impetus and encouragement for their views.

Local actors recognized results as the following: opportunity for gaining a new knowledge, understanding of problems, importance of information and cooperation exchange, recognition of 'others', capability for evaluation of plans, understanding of different

roles and responsibilities, importance of team work and bundling of knowledge from different sources in problem solving, and finally, collective action and interaction. In the following chapters they are grouped as individual, collaborative and governance capacities.

As an important result of the process the new '... knowledge about strategic plan ...', and '... the possibilities of financing the implementation of the plan ...' has been recognized. Through the opinion that the participatory process enabled '...focus on urban issues...', an overview of '...the weaknesses (economic, institutional and governance...)', but as well '...the opportunities for solving the problems...', the understanding of the problems has been shown. One of the interviewed actors recognized this as '... amended philosophy of thinking about the development of the city ...'. The importance of information and cooperation exchange has been expressed through the following view: '...cooperation of individuals and institutions enabled exchange of data and increase in knowledge...'

Increased capacities for dialogue have been recognized through '...better understanding of common attitudes and different opinions...' and '...communication improvement...'. Establishment of cooperation contributes to it, and one of the interviewed actors saw it as '...one of the most important results...' because '... some did not even know each other, and here they were working together in the common interest ...'. The process enabled '...connection of the people interested in city development...', '...gathering wide team of experts, different institutions, which usually work in separated, sector manner, and in

the future, while working on implementation of the plan, they will commonly contribute to city development...'. Involvement of '...others...' – '...kids, students, youth, marginalized groups...' means recognition and respect of 'others' as well. Regarding the conflict resolution it was noted that '...instead of quarrelling, the political parties have finally started to think uniquely about problem solving ...'. One of the interviewed actors stressed that the result of the process is '...confirmation of the statement that strategic planning is prerequisite and the right way for dynamic urban development...', the method that enables '...defining of proper measures...', '...base for urban planning, sector strategies and action plans...'. The process enabled building of coalitions and understanding of different roles and responsibilities while '...focusing organizations and institutions on each other...', and '...initiating the creative process in which the priority is not political belonging, but legitimacy and building of citizens' trust...'.

Ability to bundle knowledge from different sources has been recognized through '...establishment of the team of actors with different qualifications, who commonly deliberate and work on strategy implementation...'. The process itself '...connected people, strengthened the awareness of the need for common, synergic work...' and '...led to different thinking on city future...'. Collective action and interaction enabled '...the start of depoliticization of urban governance...'.

The qualitative inquiry into the actors' perceptions of the results of the participatory planning aims to engage with the in-depth understanding of how they (actors) perceive the changes in their capacity development, but also how they recognize the different types of capacities. Initial stages of the research point out the improvement of the individual and collaborative capacities of actors, while later stages highlight better understanding of the governance capacities too.

CONCLUSIONS

This research represents an example of applying the mixed method approach to the evaluation of the capacity development changes within the participatory planning process of the formulation of Niš Development Strategy. The outcomes of this particular case confirm the generally accepted principle on how the participatory process increases actors' capacities. Besides the initial step of the trainings, by far most of the capacity development was achieved through the team and group work under participatory engagement.

Evaluation has shown increase in actors'

capacities during the planning process by 73%. This research also aims at understanding the nature of capacities. Apart from the individual capacities, the analysis looks at the collaborative and governance capacities that are developed and enhanced through the collaborative strategic planning and represent a precondition for the urban governance. Results have shown that the actors gained new knowledge and ideas about the development. They improved the communication and conflict resolving skills, and upgraded the group decision making. They also understood the benefits of the team and group work and the importance of exchange of information and different knowledge, the significance of diversity of opinions and attitudes, the value of consensus and the possibility for public dialogue.

This case has also shown the importance of trainings, especially when the new methods/instruments are to be tested. But for changes of capacities, the practical experience through common work is needed, because it represents the basis for exchange of knowledge, while dialogue is an incentive for scrutinizing the actions that provide new insights and innovation. This is the field of participatory planning, which holds potential as a continual process of developing the capacities of actors.

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