Democratic challenges for local communities in Macedonia

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There is hardly any citizen of this world who will not be affected by the consequences of climate change. Living on a mountain you see snow and glaciers rapidly disappear, near the see the water is rising, in cities people are confronted with heat stress, in rural areas with draughts and flooding. Climate change is a global problem with massive local impact that can only be confronted through global agreements and local action. One citizen from the town of Vinica in the eastern part of Macedonia said: "Before, I always thought climate change was something big you could not influence at all, now I know we all have to contribute in our own way to the solution." Her understanding was a result of the program for Municipal Climate Change Strategies, implemented by Milieukontakt Macedonia, with the support of USAID. Starting with 4, expanding to 8 and finally 14 communities joined until now this program. In each community citizens defined their common values, developed pilot projects on them in working groups and a strategy on climate change together, to be adopted by the community council. This process, which is quite elaborated and takes almost a year, is well described in several handbooks[i].

Deliberative democracy

For many people democracy is a similar to voting representatives every few years. These representatives constitute a government and control the cabinet of ministers through the parliament, or the community administration through the community council. When new elections are at hand the representatives are held accountable for their actions and results and deserve your vote or not. In this cycle voters can formally issue their influence only once in several years. Sometimes four, sometimes seven and sometimes, when the government falls, in a much shorter period.

Some critics, like the Belgian writer David van Reybrouck argue that democracy is much more than a system of voting representatives. He even claims elections are only a very limited democratic instrument. In an extensive article in the Guardian[ii] he states: "in an election, you may cast your vote, but you are also casting it away for the next few years." But if elections are only a limited form of democracy what can we add to make it work better? There are both old and new ways for citizens to have more direct influence on government. The above mentioned Green Agenda methodology is one of them. Green Agenda is part of an international development for deliberative democracy. In many variations this form of democracy is based on ownership in the decision making process by the ones who are affected by the decision. Participants discuss pro' and cons on the issue at hand and get informed on the backgrounds and consequences. Where in a representative democracy candidates promote their ideas in front of large audiences, in deliberative processes the audiences themselves try to find out what is the best solution through dialogue and information sharing.

Climate Change

Climate change is a typical example of a 'glocal' phenomenon. It has both global and local implications and causes. The emissions created by the current 7.5 billion people on earth have a growing impact on the world's climate. This impact is expected to increase in the next decades. On the local level, each of us contributes more or less to this problem and is affected by its consequences. Extreme weather conditions, floods and draughts are the most visible effects many of us experience today. A declining group of sceptics still argue that climate change is not caused by humans but by developments outside our span of control, such as increased solar activities or fluctuations in the climate. There have always been colder and warmer periods during the earth' existence, and this may be just one of them, they argue. But this time the speed of the change is unprecedented in history and scientific evidence on the relation between greenhouse gas emissions and climate change is building up with the same acceleration.

Another thing is that the earth' population is growing fast, and an increasing number of people is born in or settles in vulnerable coastal areas. Therefore, a flood will cause more casualties than it would a hundred years ago. But it may be considered as a fact that the number of floods is increasing with the rising sea level. If you live in a village in Macedonia and experience flooding like the ones this summer, the discussion if this flood is a natural disaster caused by increased solar activity or by manmade emission of greenhouse gasses is redundant. Adaptation measures have to be taken to prevent this from happening again. And you are willing to support any activity that might help to stop these events. Climate change is an example of what Hardin called "The tragedy of the Commons" [iii]. Based on a pamphlet by Wiliam Foster Lloyd (Lloyd, 1883) on the effects of overgrazing on common grounds Hardin describes what happens to common goods if people use more of it than they are entitled to if everybody gets his own share. The atmosphere is a common good that can only absorb a limited amount of greenhouse gasses. If all people would stick to their part of that amount it would not influence the global climate. But if we all 'own' the

atmosphere we have to agree on its maintenance and every individual has to limit his or her emission to a certain level. The costs of exceeding that limit are for all of us while the short term profits are for the individual. The consequence is that we have to agree on governing the common good, enforce this agreement and contribute in our circle of influence. Each contribution is important but the effects of the individual contributions are not visible on the short term. This means that individual actions to mitigate climate change are taken based on the belief that in the long term your contribution, in cooperation with all other contributions will give the desired outcome. This belief can only be based on knowledge and trust.

Local action

The quote from the lady from Vinica says it all. She gained knowledge through the MCCS project on the effects of Climate Change and on her own contribution. But there was probably more to this project that strengthened her belief. This was the fact that she realized that it might not only be the government or the big institutions that have to take care of us. As citizens we may have the right to vote, but we also have our civic responsibilities to make a contribution to society. We can only perform this civic duty if we have the means and possibilities to participate in the decision making process. And we can only feel motivated to participate if this process leads to tangible results. This is exactly what the program on Municipal Climate Change Strategies did.

Green Agenda

The program is based on a methodology called Green Agenda. A local process working towards actions for sustainability in a community. In this case sustainability was narrowed down to mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Key notions in the process are participation, values, ownership and tangible results.
The start of each Green Agenda process lies with an open invitation to communities to submit a proposal to, in this case, Milieukontakt

Macedonia. The proposal is undersigned by representatives from the local administration and a local civil society organization. Milieukontakt and USAID Macedonia selected, in the first round eight communities of which four could participate in the full project and four could join the training sessions. At this stage in total 14 municipalities joined the program.
In short the Green Agenda process is based on values defined by the local citizens and their representative bodies. Based on these values, like 'water', 'culture', 'forest' or 'agriculture' participants can join a working group under that title. These working groups define, in a number of steps, the main challenges connected to the value defined. Contributions to support the challenges are prioritized and pilots are defined. In the MCCS project one of these priorities is chosen as an urgent action to establish a tangible result for the participants and the community as a whole in a process that may take more than 18 months. An example is the improvement of a water filtering station or increasing the energy efficiency of a public building by insulation of the roof, windows and walls. Motivated by the urgent action participants continue to deliberate and discuss priorities until they finalize a strategic document, which is presented for adoption to the community council. This is an important step which links deliberative democracy to representative democracy. When the document is adopted pilot projects are implemented through a co-funding construction.

Tearce

An excellent example of a pilot project are the adaptation measures taken by the community of Tearce in North West Macedonia to reduce the risks and damages caused by floods and erosion. The pilot consisted of adaptation measures against flooding by cleaning and repairing the riverbed and the damaged cascade cut-off walls of a kilometer-long section of the Ponika river. Existing erosion control dams in the river were restored, and technical

measures were taken to improve the riverbed capacity to prevent water-related disasters during extreme climate events. The US Ambassador Jess L. Baily noted: "We recognize that even as world leaders and experts come together to address climate change at the global level, people at the local level also play a key role in responding to this threat; therefor the main goal of USAID's Municipal Climate Change Strategies project is to strengthen the capacity of individual communities to find solutions that work best for them."

USAID contributed 4,082,687 denars to this project and the municipality 1,020,672 denars. The work payed off almost immediately because Macedonia was hit by severe floods in August 2016 and Tearce was not harmed, thanks to the new measures taken.

Democratic traditions

We can use adaptation measures against the effects of climate change but we can also adapt democracy to improve livelihoods and strengthen the citizens sense of ownership. This helps both governments and citizens. It is a mind shift from: "The government should take care of us" towards "In cooperation we take care of ourselves and the government is one of the partners". As a former part of Yugoslavia Macedonia has a tradition in citizens' participation in the form of Local Self Government. This tradition dates back to the Ottoman Empire when communities had their village assemblies and chosen 'major'. In the 1950's this tradition was continued by the partisan government by introducing the Social Self Government. These bodies consisted of workers, farmers and other groups from the community, with a high level of decision making power. With the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963 the influence of the local self government bodies was destroyed by the *'..political supremacy of the Union of Communists'* [iv]

In 2003 the Macedonian law on self government [v] was adopted, stating in article 12: *'The neighborhood self-government forms in the Republic of Macedonia can be organized, in terms of territory, in urban and neighborhood communities'.*

Currently there is an association of units of Local Self Government (ZELS) and a ministry of Local Self Government which published on the 9th of March 2016, an ambitious "Action plan for the implementation of 2015 – 2020 program for sustainable local development and decentralization", with the main thematic goal to *'..Promote more efficient participation of citizens, business entities and other key stakeholders in the development, implementation and monitoring of sustainable local development policies.'* [vi]

In other words, local democracy has a history in Macedonia dating back to the Ottoman empire and is not something imported from outside. Programs like Green Agenda but also the program on Community forums, supported by the Swiss SDC, connect to this long lasting tradition. However, for generations born after 1963 these programs may mean a renewed acquaintance with forms of local democracy that play a role outside the ballot box where they can elect their representatives.

Thinking outside the ballot box

Many intellectuals, scattered around the world are reinventing democracy with new ideas, tools and methods. For sure the voting system will continue to play a leading role but new possibilities emerge and are tested throughout the globe. From Canada to Australia, China, USA, Europe and Africa people are looking for ways to strengthen their influence on the decision making process. On the one hand there is severe criticism on representative democracy and fear for the strength of populist parties using (social) media to gain support with one liners and anti-establishment programs making use of the fear and worries of citizens living in a globalizing world. On the other hand there is a positive wave of methods for dialogue, digital interaction, sortition, transparency and openness of society creating opportunities for adapting and strengthening democracy. One of

the first organizations exploring this area was 'America speaks'[vii]. Since 1995 the organization organized large meetings where participants could form their opinion through dialogue. Instead of the traditional one person on the stage and everybody listens, the room was filled with a few hundred tables where people could join a dialogue on, for example, rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Based on the work of James Fishkin [viii]more innovations were developed in amongst others Australia where the *The Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance* is, by its own words, a world-leading center in the field of deliberative democracy. Beside dialogue sortition was introduced as a means to overcome the shortcomings of the current voting system. In 2014 Alexander Guerrero published an article promoting the 'Lottocracy' [ix]as an alternative for representative democracy. Sortition, already in use with the ancient Greeks, was in fact used in the drafting of the new constitution for Iceland and laws in Ireland. It still is one of the instruments that select people for the G1000. This gathering of citizens which was first organized 2011 in Belgium is currently taking place in several communities in the Netherlands. The UK based scientist Graham Smith made an inventory of democratic innovations and developed a framework.[x] You can look at these innovations from six different angles:

1. *Inclusiveness*, the level of participation from different groups and strata in society
2. *Popular control*, in which you measure the influence of participants on the different aspects of the decision making process.
3. *Considered judgement*, the time for deliberation and information sharing given to participants to speak in depth about the issue and develop a thorough opinion about it
4. *Transparency*, a clear understanding with participants and wider public about the role and decision making power of the process the participate in.

5. *Efficiency*, the balance between costs and benefits of the process.
6. *Transferability*, can the process be transferred to another place or level.

If you look at Green Agenda from Smith' perspective based on the knowledge gained through the monitoring visits made to all participating communities, we come to the following conclusions:

Inclusiveness
Gender and inclusiveness of minorities was an important feature of the MCCS program. Although inclusiveness is seen as the most difficult feature in public participation the program succeeded in general to maintain a balance in the field of gender. When you take a close look at the different working groups you see that some were dominantly female and some dominantly male. Also in some, more traditional geographic area's there were more men involved in the process, whereas in other area's more women were active. In the field of minorities participants tell that efforts were made to include for example Roma into the program. Some of the projects succeeded in including such minorities. Including participants from remote villages and of lower education was reported as much more difficult.

Popular control
Participants report they were satisfied about their influence in the project and the priorities chosen. One lady was pleasantly surprised that 'her project' was implemented. They also understood that prioritization was necessary and were happy with the result although the chosen pilot projects may not have been their favorites. This is a sign that a process works. Participants can live with an outcome that does not fully support their interests because they understand and accept the decision making process.

Considered judgement
The number of meetings, the careful process of choosing values and setting priorities was appreciated by most of the participants although they sometimes felt it was too much talking and meetings. The discussions with locals with specific knowledge and the support of experts on methodologies and climate change helped them in making their judgement.

Transparency
Almost all participants report that at the start the Green Agenda process was new to them and it was hard to grasp what it really meant. A lot of new methods and words were used that could only be understood after some time. Looking back they say it was worthwhile but at the time some had doubts on what they stepped into. The group of Prilep came with the following recommendation:
"If you consider the fact that people voluntarily contribute 14 days to the project, this is amazing. In general everything that is developed in the Green Agenda project is very honest and related to what has been developed. It has a completely different approach. The terminology could be more user friendly. for a broad group of people. You need a more human explanation. "

Efficiency
Green Agenda is a time consuming process, including sessions for working groups, training on methods, meetings and writing sessions. Most of the participants are not payed for their contribution. Participants report that it is a lot of work but in balance with the results achieved. In the next paragraph we will go into the results of the process.

Transferability
Green Agenda has been conducted in more than a dozen countries so far and with success. Is has been implemented in micro regions, small towns and villages. So the transferability is clear.

Results
If you look at the above mentioned criteria Green Agenda does not make a bad impression. Of course it needs a much more thorough, and probably quantitative survey to be able to confirm this view. In the field of climate change some quantitative figures are available. The program reduced by now 314 tons of CO_2, involved almost a 130.000 citizens and implemented 20 pilot projects, while it is still under way. But there are more results that may not be counted in figures but are important for the success of the program and the sustainability of the measures implemented. One result is the visibility of the implemented pilots for the people that live in the communities. In Pechevo, Studenicani and Bogdanci clean drinking water is available again. Buildings were insulated in Krivogastani,Pehcevo, Bogdanci and Mavrovo Rostushe, riverbeds were cleaned and upraded in Bogovinje, Studenicani, Vinica and Tearce. So the people from the villages see the results of the program and feel the comfort of an insulated public building, clean drinking water and dry feet when there is excessive rain.
The working groups who put so much effort in the program feel ownership for the results, as does the municipal administration who contributed financially. The process by itself strengthened the ties in the communities through meetings where people held dialogues and shared ideas about what they think is important for their community. This is something we seldom do. As citizens we rather sit together and discuss the failures of government over a beer or two. And finally, like the lady from Vinica, participants learned about climate change, democracy and their own community. A learning experience that is passed to their children with the educational bus on climate Change

that is touring Macedonia since March 2015.

To conclude one may say that the program for Municipal Strategies on Climate Change has made a significant contribution to the development of a solution for this world wide problem. Of course Macedonia is but a tiny spot on the globe. But it is not the only one and if we all do like the people from the communities participating in this program it would reduce our Climate footprint and maybe save us from the disasters foreseen if we do not act glocally.

[i] See amongst others Rikalo N. & Donner J. (2011), *Green Agenda on the western Balkans*, Amsterdam, Milieukontakt International, http://milieukontakt.net/en/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Green-Agenda-on-the-Western-Balkans-128-pages-+-cover-1.pdf

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[iii] Hardin, G (1968), "The Tragedy of the Commons". Science. 162 (3859): 1243–1248.doi:10.1126/science.162.3859.1243.PMID 5699198 and Foster Lloyd W. (1833), *'Two Lectures on the Checks to Population'*, Oxford, UK, http://www.geo.mtu.edu/~asmayer/rural_sustain/governance/Hardin%201968.pdf

[iv] Sevic Z. (Apr., 1953), Local Self government in Yogoslavia and Djordjevic Jovan, Local Self-Government in Yugoslavia, The American Slavic and East European Review, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 188-200 http://www.jstor.org/stable/2491675 Page Count: 13

[v] Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2003) *Law on Territorial Organization of the Local Self-Government in the Republic of Macedonia,* Skopje, Macedonia, http://www.libertas-institut.com/de/MK/nationallaws/Law%20on%20territorial%20organization%20of%20the%20LSG.pdf

[vi] Ministry of Local self government, 2016, *Action plan for the implementation of 2015 – 2020 program for sustainable local development,* http://mls.gov.mk/images/documents/lokalnasamouprava/EN_WEB/AKCISKI_PLAN_EN_WEB.pdf

[vii] America Speaks (2013), *A legacy,* http://ncdd.org/rc/wp-content/uploads/AmericaSpeaks_Legacy.pdf

[viii] Fishkin, J.S. (2009), *When the people speak,* Oxford University Press, New York, USA

[ix] Guerrero A., *The Lottocracy, forget voting it's time to start choosing our leaders by lottery* https://aeon.co/essays/forget-voting-it-s-time-to-start-choosing-our-leaders-by-lottery

[x] Graham Smith, Democratic Innovations (2009), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK