

Foreword

How to Improve Development at Local Level

A Handbook with Best Practice Examples from South-East Europe

In the context of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe and in co-operation with the national institutions, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) initiated in spring 2001 a regional project “Local Self-Government and Decentralization in South-East Europe”, focusing on the situation and the reforms of self-government and decentralization in the countries of the region. The project covers Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovenia. In all these countries some reforms of local governments have been implemented or respective reform programmes are under discussion. The countries of the region started the transition process under similar conditions and consequently the intended reforms during the implementation process led to similar problems and common interests in this field. Therefore, the exchange of experiences and the dialogue on the different reform approaches must be seen as instrumental to that end, which may help to launch successful strategies and to avoid unnecessary failures.

Against this background, the project's goal is to encourage the public debate with policy makers, researchers, and experts at the national and the local level. The final target group of the project, however, are practitioners at the local level who initiate or organize the implementation of reform programmes in the local context. In order to attain this objective, the project was developed in two venues: on the one hand, the regional workshops with experts from the concerned countries and the publication of the results for their utilization in national workshops at the local level, and the production of a handbook with best practice examples on the other.

Since the start of this project in 2001, ten workshops with a regional expert group have taken place focusing on various topics of local self-government. The results of the workshops have been documented in publications and distributed to community administrations and associations, research institutions and individuals, who are in charge of community affairs. The publications in the English language are listed

below. However, the ultimate goal of the project is to make those results available to practitioners at the local level, so it was necessary to translate the English publications into the national languages of the region for distribution. The translated publications have been then used as resource materials in local workshops.

In addition to these activities and in order to refer even more to the experiences of successful initiatives at the local level, the project's participants came up with the idea to produce a handbook offering a collection of best practice examples, making the regional expertise and examples available, as they might be more understandable to potential readers than the models and approaches from western countries. The handbook is meant as a tool and a source of ideas and inspiration for practitioners, administrators, city and town mayors and other people dealing with the issues of decentralization and local development at the local level. For this purpose the handbook provides a general overview of topics which are important for local development by canvassing the situation in the region, and presents some useful strategies for dealing with issues by means of case studies. It is supposed to be an instrument to generate ideas for eventual problem solutions for the practitioners who find themselves in the situations similar to the ones described in the case studies. Therefore, the handbook is not written as a book for experts; in its language and the style it is intended for a wider readership.

The handbook offers a comprehensive account of the major problems of local development divided into the following eight topics: Economic Development, Municipality Management, Financing and Public Services, Community Development, Citizens Participation, Local Minority Programmes, Forms of Co-operation, and Environmental Protection. These eight chapters revolve around the main theme: local development in the context of local self-government and decentralized structures. The chapters are written as an introduction to the problems in different areas of local development and as accounts of case studies providing possible problem solutions.

The contributions to this handbook come from an international team of authors from the region and are based on the experiences and case studies of their home countries. However, a number of case studies was collected and provided by other persons who work in the field of local development. On behalf of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung I would like to thank all the contributors, in particular the Urban Institute in Zagreb for their

assistance in providing the case studies, and to Professor Nenad Zakošek and Ana Briški for the editing.

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Publications of the project edited by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Zagreb:

ⁱ *Local Self Government and Decentralization in South-East Europe. Proceedings of the Workshop held in Zagreb, 6th April 2001*, Zagreb 2001

ⁱⁱ *Financing Local Self-Government. Case Studies from Germany, Slovenia and Croatia*, Zagreb 2001

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Interreg Model. Practical Experience in Cross Border Co-operation*, Zagreb 2001

^{iv} *Citizens Participation in Local Self-Government. Experiences of South-East European Countries*, Zagreb 2001

^v *Decentralizing Government. Problems and Reform Prospects in South-East Europe*, Zagreb 2002

^{vi} *National Minorities in South-East-Europe. Legal and Social Status at Local Level*, Zagreb 2002

^{vii} *Executive and Legislature at Local Level. Structure and Interrelation in Countries of South-East Europe*, Zagreb 2002

^{viii} *Economic Development on the Local and Regional Level. Initiatives in South-East Europe*, Zagreb 2003

^{ix} *Reforms of Public Services. Experiences of Municipalities and Regions in South-East Europe*, Zagreb 2003

^x *Reforming Local Public Administration. Efforts and Perspectives in South-East European Countries*, Zagreb 2004

Some of the publications or single articles of the publications have been translated and published in the national languages as well. All the publications are available in pdf on our web site www.fes.hr.