

Re-conceptualizing Community Liaison Structure

Experiences and recommendations

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Community Liaison: Challenges and experiences of a new concept

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1. Why a Community Liaison¹?

Although local democracy in Albania after the collapse of communist regime in 1991, has made significant steps forward regarding community involvement in governance and political decision-making, it still lacks a lot in terms of power decentralization, community development and participation in policy-making. Citizens have a lot of difficulties to communicate, propose and find solutions for deficiencies and problems they face regarding public and social services. The urban developments of the last decades as the demographic changes, overpopulation of urban centers and many other contemporary phenomena, are increasingly motivating the need for community organization and development, as well as increase of public responsibility.

The same principles are applied in the process of implementation of the European Urban Charter² which was approved in 1992 by European Commission, and revised in 2007 with other recommendations. This document foresees the needs of urban organizations, having in mind the rapid development of European cities. Towns and cities are the places where social changes and new lifestyles are expressed or confirmed. This charter explicitly defines the need that democratic systems have for political participation of the urban community, not only through exercising the fundamental right to vote and elect their state's representatives, but also through direct political role of the people engaged in community based organizations. According to this international document³, the cities are places of freedom, shared knowledge and collective responsibility. This is possible by utilizing specific methods, like civic participation in the decision-making process, or in executive duties; or social cohesion that aims to minimize cultural, ethnic, racial divergences through integration of the society.

One of the biggest challenges related to the enforcement of rule of law in Albania is the decentralization process of the institutional power, oriented in community organizations. This can alternatively be interpreted in wider civic participation concerning decision-making at all levels, citizen partnership with respect to law enforcement in various fields, encouragement of civic forums, advocacy and lobbying in the interest of the community etc. As a consequence the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)⁴, three years ago initiated the challenge of promoting the community based structures in Shkodra Municipality, while a year ago launched the project of establishing the CL structure in Durrës Municipality, first with six and recently with 18 CLs, all engaged under the umbrella of local government. In the meantime in the capita, Tirana, IDM has conducted an evaluation of the present practice of CLs' activity regarding the function and restructure of the role and duties that this instrument should cover.

In a general analysis of IDM activity, and joint efforts with other local partners, we can safely assess that the structure of CL has been successful in the city of Durrës,

¹ Referring in the Law No. 8562, Date 31.07.2000 "On the organization and function of local governance", and previous experiences, the context of Community Liaison can be encountered with different names "chairman of the village" "elderly of the village", "community tutor" etc

² Council of Europe, *European Urban Charter*, October 16th 2007, http://www.coe.int/t/congress/files/themes/urban-charter/default_EN.asp

³ Ibid.

⁴ For more information regarding Institute for Democracy and Mediation please visit our website www.idmalbania.org or contact us via email: info@idmalbania.org

and on the other hand the community based boards in Shkodra have resulted functional. However in this publication, our main concern remains the issue how the public and non-public actors should work together in raising the awareness of institutions and people for their contribution and role in developing a participatory democracy starting from the grassroots. Thus, by establishing a sustainable structure such as the CL and consolidating a local approach of problems and implications, might represent the needed instruments towards a transparent and participatory democracy in the local communities.

- Mission and Role of Community Liaison.

The role of CL consists in the **foundation of a functional communication bridge between the society and local - central government bodies**, in respect of applicable laws of that territory. At the same time he/she **facilitates community representation in governing structures by acting as a messenger in the community and in public institutions.**

The mission of the structure of CL is to **fulfill the assigned obligations from public institutions, and stimulate the awareness raise of state's representatives regarding problems that the grassroots are facing.**

Mission of Community Liaison

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fulfilling assigned tasks and helping in the local and central government acknowledgement of the population everyday problems- Institutional partnership and civic participation in the enforcement of rule of law- Community organization and mobilization |
|---|

The role of Community Liaison

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- CL is an instrument of support of governing institutions in regards to law enforcement- Facilitates the community representation in governing structures and acts as community missionary |
|--|

Some specific duties that the CL must accomplish in his/her activity are as follows:

- Conducts public meetings with the inhabitants of a particular locality, aiming to gather opinions of interested groups or individuals and at the same time suggests to the Municipality administration to include proposals coming from the grassroots, which are later presented to the Municipality Council for approval.
- When entitled by the Municipality Council or when directly asked from the inhabitants, the CL can help the population to solve different issues and problems that are linked to community obligations, and sometimes settles possible conflicts within the community
- Collaborates with police in fulfilling their duties in the field of public order and respect of the law.

- Cooperates with local government institutions that are accountable in the field of social care and support. The CL identifies and informs about the families that live in poverty and are eligible for economic aid or special treatment from the state structures.
- Helps the taxing department of the municipality administration to collect adequately the tax revenues from the businesses and grassroots.
- Helps in the verification process of population registration.
- Locates the outlawed interventions in reconstruction industry, in the water distribution system, streets, public squares, parks etc
- Informs the Municipality for the results of his/her own observations and monitoring in the community and in cases of civil emergencies like fires, floods, land sliding, earthquakes etc, takes measures in accordance with the provisions foreseen in state documents and legal framework.

2. International experiences: differences and similarities

*"Community based organizations enable people to break their crippling isolation from each other, to reshape their mutual values and expectations and rediscover the possibilities of acting collaboratively - the prerequisites of any successful self-help initiative."*⁵

Barrack Obama

The structure of the CL is not a new concept. It has been developed in the past from different states and independent institutions in various countries of the world. Regardless of the diverse connotations but same philosophy like Community Organizer (in the United States), Community Anchor (in England)⁶, 'Community Coordinator' etc, this structure was created as a necessity for effective harmonization of relations, obligations and reciprocal engagements of public institutions with the community. This aims the establishment of functional channels of communication between the community, government and third actors (providers of services, NGOs, businesses etc). As such the structure of CL is tightly linked with various problems, mostly essential for the wellbeing of the population and challenges that need immediate solutions. In difference from the underdeveloped countries, in the nations with solid democracies and rule of law the concept of CL is developed in other dimensions, being expanded from the perspective of the CL as a individual, in the role of CL as an organized body or network with institutional basis in the service of community and government.

In the previous experiences we can assess as significant the example of the CL coming from South Africa. Here it was the central government itself that delegated the needed responsibilities and authority to the institutions of local government to open the way for the establishment of the structure of CL. This instrument of community development is composed by different experts of various fields who intend to keep daily contacts between the community and the state's institutions. Its major duties are assistance in resolving stalemates, social democracy promotion and strength, giving voice to the poor and people in need, and endorsing the communication in the governance - community network.⁷ To be more concrete the South African model represents a good example with regard to interaction and interconnection of all the potential actors in community policies and decision-making. These are state's institutions, non-governmental organizations, businesses, service providers, grassroots etc, all of them cooperating with the mediation of CL. This model was used at a large extent in the efforts to resolve the issue of drinking water management, hygiene and health in different urban areas of South Africa.⁸

In Gana instead, the CL structure seems sustainable and is mostly appreciated in the role of an educator and adviser for the community regarding serious matters that are

⁵ Obama. Barack, After Alinsky: Community Organizing in Illinois, University of Illinois at Springfield 1990, <http://www.edwoj.com/Alinsky/AlinskyObamaChapter1990.htm>

⁶ Cabinet Office UK, Public Service Agreements, www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about_the_cabinet_office/publicserviceagreements.aspx

⁷ *A Handbook on Community Development Workers in South Africa*, , www.thedplg.gov.za/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=25

⁸ Plummer, Janelle (Ed). *Focusing Partnerships : A Sourcebook for Municipal Capacity Building in Public-Private Partnerships*. London, , GBR: Earthscan Publications, Limited, 2002. p 88. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/universitetsbiblioteket/Doc?id=10128963&ppg=105>

linked with methods of participatory governance or concrete problems like drinking water access, hygienic standards, health etc. In addition, in England, being aware of the importance that this structure represents, the CL enjoys a recognized independent status: "...these are independent organizations with multifunctional tasks in the role of referent point for local communities and community based organizations. They own and manage community values and support initiatives that aim community organizations in different fields"⁹

In France the activity of the CL is more specialized and aims to be a negotiating structure concerning possible conflicts between state's institutions and community. As such another well-established model is the role of "Mediator of the Republic" in the French concept of "Institutional Control". Based in these practices the Mediator of the Republic has been responsible since 1973, for solving out of the court rooms disputes between citizens and state administration in general.¹⁰

In the United States the CL branded with the name of "community organizer" plays a crucial role in various tasks, however the most successful is the one of assisting in community policing. He/she stands as a connecting bridge between the Police and community in respecting the rule of law and crime prevention and punishment. To stress the American experience, naturally the most well-known example of the 'community organizer' is the current President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, who began his career as a mere CL in Chicago. Today, more than 20 years later, his current governing platform as the President of U.S.A, continues to defend the principles of community development and organization with the ultimate goal of a sustainable development of the local communities, especially in the poor areas.¹¹ In his memoir "*Dreams of my father*", Obama writes for the time he was a Community Organizer:

*"Change won't come from the top, I would say. Change will come from a mobilized grassroots. That's what I'll do. I'll organize black folks. At the grass roots. For change..."*¹²

3. The performance of the CL: The Albanian Experience

For the development of good local governance it is indispensable above all, a serious and encompassing engagement of the community in the decision-making process. In the Albanian context, such an approach becomes a prerequisite if we were to consider the inherited legitimacy of an old social mentality where the democratic tradition has

⁹ Gillians. Lin & Melanie. Nock, "Community Anchors", Kensington and Chelsea Social Council, [www.kcsc.org.uk/Asp/uploadedFiles/File/Community%20Anchors%20final%20version%20\(2\).doc](http://www.kcsc.org.uk/Asp/uploadedFiles/File/Community%20Anchors%20final%20version%20(2).doc)

¹⁰ Caddy, J; Vergez, C. (2001) Citizens as partners, information, consultation and public participation in policy-making. Paris, OCDE

¹¹ Ryan. Liza, *Barack Obama's Unlikely Political Education: The Agitator*, http://www.pickensdemocrats.org/info/TheAgitator_070319.htm

¹² Obama. Barack, *After Alinsky: Community Organizing in Illinois*, University of Illinois at Springfield 1990, <http://www.edwoj.com/Alinsky/AlinskyObamaChapter1990.htm>

been missing and which is actually at its first and fragile steps of consolidation. Thus, in an environment where the strengthening of democratic policy-making institutions remains a challenge due to their weak performance, the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making through specific models would not only increase the transparency of local structures in the eyes of the public, but at the same time would giveaway the current stereotypes on local governance and lack of trust by the citizens in these structures. This, per se, would bring in a more positive social perception and citizens would not feel ignored or passive actors of transformations.

3.1 Shkodra: Community based groups revival

For a long time, IDM has been engaged in approaching local governance structures to the citizens concerns, at the benefit of creating a suitable environment in match with the true values of a local democracy. A serious and illustrative effort of an approach is the up to now work that IDM has undertaken in the city of Shkodra. Through the precious contribution of the existing CLs, IDM has been able to successfully promote its experience of community mobilization in the city of Shkodra. Initially such an innovative approach of citizens' mobilization was undertaken in the Regions No. 2 and No. 3 of the city through the building and operation of five Community Based Groups, which have been more than active in this last two years in the city of Shkodra. Not only have they assisted the community in delivering their concerns towards the local structures' attention but in the same time they have cooperated with these structures for the realization of joint projects with the aim of improving the community's life.

Activities implemented by these volunteer groups, have been rich and have covered a large range of problematic issues related to the community where these groups reside. Some of the most important activities these groups implement are the organization of meetings with representatives from institutions at the local level; negotiation and arrangement of various memorandums of understanding with such institutions on priority issues for the community; roundtables with representatives from law enforcement agencies with the aim of establishing cooperation; various social, cultural and artistic activities with various social groups, such as youth, families in need, third age, etc. At present, a Memorandum of Understanding and Partnership has been established between Shkodra Municipality and these groups, by so developing a strong feeling of awareness and self-belonging of the community in these areas.

One of the most important issues in the capacity building of the community based groups, has been their strengthening in terms of enabling them to raise their own independent funds. However, it is time to point out that the main challenge of the up to now experience remains the elaboration of partnerships with other stakeholders beyond local governance, such as the business sector or various local and international organizations and institutions operating in the city of Shkodra.

On this purpose and by making use of the established capacities in the city of Shkodra, IDN is convinced that the structure of the CL, already existing in this city since 1994, can be transformed into an instrument which would lead the up to now efforts towards a self-sustainable democracy. At present, 22 CLs work on a part-time basis in

this municipality, although their role and performance still requires improvement and restructuring, in order to better face the various problems emerging in a growing city.

Since this year, IDM in cooperation with Shkodra Municipality started to raise capacities of this structure, through technical assistance and various trainings, with the aim of transforming this structure into a dynamic and active model for the city of Shkodra.

Such a structure developed in Shkodra can serve as an instrument for the achievement of social cohesion through governance at the local and central level. Worthy to mention at this point, is the new initiative that IDM for the first time is undertaking in Albania, which constitutes in the utilization of this structure as a promoter of local initiatives, what in itself would assist the community's self-development. On this purpose, parallel to the strengthening of the CL structure, IDM is working on the raising of a "*Local Trust Fund*", which will be developed with the input of representatives from various interested groups, from the public and private sphere, and through the contribution of local government structures, local business as well as interested donors. The fund will be managed by a board consisting of municipal representatives, the local business and civil society. Due to its very coordinating and synergy-gathering character, the role of the CL is seen as crucial in the initial establishment and performance of the Fund.

Finally, as it can be understood, through the re-dimensioning and strengthening of the CL structure in the city of Shkodra, IDM seeks to institutionalize a practice that in the long run would address many challenges, of both the community and the local government. The so far practice has however showed that the standardization of its functional tasks would bring in a more balanced position of this structure among the many local partners, be they public or private. The finding of such equilibrium remains a crucial issue which is directly associated with the concept of democratic participation in the decision-makers' agenda at all levels of executive power.

3.2 Tirana: Achievements and obstacles

The structure of the CL operates in the Municipality of Tirana for 15 years. In 1994, the Municipality of Tirana approved the decision that recognizes each Municipal Unit the right to employ on a part-time basis and with a per diem remuneration the CLs. At present around 220 CLs work in 11 Municipal Units of Tirana, thus approximately 20 CLs per Unit.

The CL is selected and appointed by the Head of the respective Municipal Unit, with some selection criteria established by the staff of the municipal unit. Every CL is provided with a folder that contains the tasks to be performed. Nevertheless, due to the fast increasing population of the capital, there is a constant demand by the Association of Tirana Municipal Units for the increase in number of the CLs, as well as raise of their monthly remuneration.

Below there is a descriptive list of the number of CLs per Unit, gender participation and respective population:¹³

	Total	Females	Size of Population Covered
Municipal Unit No.1	20	2	50 000 residents
Municipal Unit No 5	25	5	76 000 residents
Municipal Unit No 9	17	4	22 000 residents
Municipal Unit No. 10	14	6	26 800 residents
Municipal Unit No. 11	18	2	30 000 residents

Throughout the contacts and the various meetings organized with Tirana Municipal Units it results as following¹⁴ :

" The number of CLs in Tirana is insufficient to cope with all socio-economic problems of an increasing population, as it is the case with Tirana. Furthermore the process does need the input of citizens as well as responsibility sharing.

" Mayors of the Municipal Units agree that the fee (honorarium) the CLs profit in exchange for their services does not justify the work required by them. Indeed efforts should be made that the fees to be based on honorariums from both central and local government.

" Most of the CLs current job description relates to assisting central government institutions. Meanwhile no central institution, benefiting from services offered by the CL, is part of the remuneration that CLs receive.

" There are still un-clarities with regard to the selection process and selection criteria for CLs. In fact there is not a standardized process of their selection, appointment, length of mandate and performance evaluation.

" There is no gender balance in the selection of the CLs, a concern expressed also by OSCE senior representatives in Tirana.

" There is no agenda establishing the work and competences of the CL as well as there is no format indicating its interaction with other law enforcement agencies.

¹³ This data are collected during a series of meeting, conducted by IDM staff with the participation of 5 Municipality Units, respectively Unit 1, 5, 9, 10, 11.

¹⁴ The data are collected from the report of the round-table on "Capacity building for a good governance and participation. The role of Community Liaison in Tirana", organized by IDM in collaboration with the Association of Municipality Units of Tirana.

In the meantime, according to an IDM's survey on this structure, undertaken in 2008 through focus group discussions¹⁵, it results that the citizens of Tirana hardly recognize this structure and the CLs themselves do not have capacities and knowledge to interact with the community. Furthermore, with the increase of population in the urban areas, management of their work is becoming impossible by so rendering the increase of their number a necessity.

Taking into consideration the growing problems in the capital, emerges the need for a large dissemination of legal information and interpretation in the functions of the CL's work, accompanied with awareness raising of all actors, local and central, on the important role this structure is playing. Parallel to this comes the need for capacity building of this structure to better face the new problems of the city and to enable them in issues connected with community mobilization, and interaction with other structures beyond the local government, such as: law enforcement agencies, central institutions at the local level, various businesses operating in the area where they live, as well as other structures of civil society at large.

The function and role of the CL should be understood as multi-dimensional and it is in the benefit of both: the local structures and the community. Indeed there is a need to emphasize the fact that the CLs in their every day work often offer services that are of benefit for the central institutions too, a fact that calls for identification of those structures that depend on the central government and with which the CLs really cooperate, as these very structures could become a possible resource for increasing the fund of CLs remuneration.

3.3 Durrës: The success of a new structure

In the city of Durrës, IDN has applied a very innovative approach in the promotion and strengthening of the structure of the CL. Since one year, IDM has started the awareness raising process on this structure in the city of Durrës, by organizing various meetings and round-tables with the municipality's local executives, in order to inform and to make them valuable partners in this undertaking. After various meetings in group and also on individual basis, with the main stakeholders of the local decision-making, as well as representatives of other law enforcement institutions, was reached the consensus that makes possible for the Municipality's budget to cover the setting up and functioning of the CL structure. Currently, 200.315 residents live in Durrës, a city which is compound of six main administrative units. Starting from April 2008, six CLs, proposed by the community, started their activity, thus one per each administrative unit. Recently, the list has been expanded to 12 more, by so increasing the number of CLs in Durrës Municipality into 18 in total. Differently from the actual selection and appointment procedure of this structure in the municipalities of Tirana and Shkodra, this time IDM and Durrës Municipality reached a consensual decision that allowed CLs to be selected and proposed with public consent, thus through the citizens' proposal and to be finally appointed by the Municipal Council.

¹⁵ Focus groups are conducted by IDM staff during August 2008 in the Municipality Units nr. 1, 5, 9, 10, 11.

Indeed, the more democratic is the procedure of the CLs appointment, the more included is the community in their selection, the more engaged is the local government (The Municipal or Commune Council), the more successful and feasible is the role of the CL in the local democracy. At present, 18 CLs have been selected and proposed by the community, appointed by the Municipal Council and are currently performing in their role as mediators between the community and the structures of Local Government in Durrës.

Based on IDM's theoretical formulation on the role and tasks of the CL in a local democracy, but also taking into consideration the context where this structure has been and will be implemented, the model is seen as a structure which has created strong basis and a sustainable model for the future.

4. Community Liaison: Challenges and obstacles

In the last meeting that IDM organized in the city of Durrës with the subject “Community Liaison, Challenges of restructuring their role in local democracy”, with the participation of representatives of local governance and civil society, were identified the most important issues surrounding the development of this structure in connection with competences, functionality, selection criteria and the perception of their role in the society. The participants, who at the same time are the main actors interested in the

development of the structure of CL in Albania, as for instance representatives from the Municipalities of Shkodra, Durrës, Tirana, civil society presence: OSCE, UNDP etc, stressed some of the most crucial obstacles that this structure is facing in the process of implementation.

Referring to participants in this event, priority was given to the stimulation of interconnection and closer communication of CLs with the community itself. This aims to create a long-term sustainable development of the structure. The director of IDM, Sotiraq Hroni, in his discussion, emphasized the importance of such an instrument, not only informing local government institutions about the situation in the ground, but at the same time in offering of possible solutions to these problems through existent community based organizations. Therefore the CLs must play an active role in establishing and functioning of community based groups or civic comities which are the core associations for pressuring governing bodies in their decision-making process and achieving a governing system based on the grassroots needs.¹⁶

Nonetheless, in order to attain a clear vision for restructuring the instrument of CL, its competences should not be extended beyond the authority of the institutions of local government¹⁷. Thus the CLs should not be seen in the role of a decision-maker but in the role of an adviser. In the mosaic of services that CLs offer, their true role is to raise issues of concern before the local or even central government institutions, propose for solutions and at the same time leave the ground for the competent state's bodies to take action¹⁸. Nevertheless we must recognize the complexity of finding the ideal positioning of CLs in relation to the governing institutions and the wide community they represent. This equilibrium can become even more complicated, considering that the structure is perceived as a representative of the community in the eyes of the municipality administration, and the other way around when perceived through the filters of the community perception, i.e. as a local government representative. Opposite; he plays the role of municipality representative in regards to the civic community. Consequently, it is somehow easier said than done for the CL to be regarded as a completely uninfluenced structure from both sides. As such the public and state's institutions should recognize the role of the CL as an independent actor who defends citizen's rights without infringing the law. For this reason, there is an immediate need to regulate and define the duties and competences of the CL making him/her a reliable instrument, and a true mediator between state and citizens.

This structure is at the same time responsible for organizing the community, while being a consistent adviser regarding valuable information on how to overcome different institutional obstacles from individuals and groups. For this reason, improving this structure's organizational skills, negotiating abilities, advocacy and lobbying capacities becomes an immediate necessity.¹⁹

¹⁶ Hroni. Sotiraq, National Meeting; "Community Liaison; Challenges and restructure of their role in local democracy", January 14th, 2009, Durrës.

¹⁷ Merkola. Gjergj, Head of Region Nr. 4, Municipality of Durrës, in National Meeting; "Community Liaison; Challenges and restructure of their role in local democracy", January 14th, 2009, Durrës.

¹⁸ Taho. Bujar, Përfaqësues i UNDP-së, National Meeting; "Community Liaison; Challenges and restructure of their role in local democracy", January 14th, 2009, Durrës.

¹⁹ Shtylla. Bashkim, Community Liaison – Durrës, National Meeting; "Community Liaison; Challenges and restructure of their role in local democracy", January 14th, 2009, Durrës.

In view of what has been discussed above, there is a necessity for wider recognition of this structure from interested institutions and the possibility to extend the cooperation with the structure of CL. It is very imperative to acknowledge the state's institutions about the fact that various concerns they might have can be addressed in the activity of the CL, by so exploiting it for joint tasks. Hence we can see the structure of CL in the service of many institutions, Municipality, Ministry of Education, Police etc.

It should be pointed out that the activity of CL should not be seen as isolated from other chains of public administration and at the same time it should indeed be understood as a long ongoing process that aims the community development by bringing citizens closer to the decision-making and executive institutions. As such, it can happen that this structure is perceived skeptically from public institutions or community itself, due to their lack of experience, knowledge and tradition. Furthermore, as main promoters of these initiatives, we are forced to face an old-fashioned perception that generally exists about the CL, the fact that this structure is regarded as a traditional structure of communism era, employed by the totalitarian regime for given political ambitions.

As a matter of fact we should stress that the activity and work of CL is first of all a perception and this perception can develop and change only by achieving positive results. In the Municipality of Durrës this skepticism, in establishing such a sustainable structure as the CL is, has changed and the project has achieved remarkable results. This is observed also in the last decision of Durrës Municipality, which increased the number of Community Liasons in Durrës from six to eighteen.²⁰

It is yet observed that, although existing as a concept and utilized in various ways in many municipalities; this structure is not sustainable and not even institutionalized. Difficulties are encountered especially in the implementation of its mission and duties, mainly due to lack of engagement and low payment for the staff etc²¹.

The CL is selected as a representative of the society, and is their voice for all the major problems and obstacles they might face with the local government. As such the selection process is very delicate and should be achieved in full transparence in order to avoid any kind of possible negative implications. Regardless of different techniques utilized for electing this structure in various municipalities, in principle, the selecting criteria of the CL should happen by a direct voting from the community and in the second stage the candidates are approved by the Municipality Council. The selection of this structure should occur in full respect with the popularity and trust he/she has in the community, organizing skills, and acknowledgement of the competences. Nonetheless we should not forget equal employment opportunities for females, which as a matter of fact are poorly represented in this position. Another issue is related to the efforts to leave aside the political divergences while appointing this structure. A worrying phenomenon in the last years is the polarization of this structure, where the CLs are not appointed on the basis of their personal skills and abilities, but on the basis of political affiliation and preferences.

The strengthening and restructuring of the position of CL is fundamental, aiming a sustainable development of the society at large and the civic community, being aware that in our country the community organization is not an easy enterprise. In this context

²⁰ Beqiraj. Lavdosh, Head of Chief of Cabinet in Durrës Municipality, National Meeting; "Community Liaison; Challenges and restructure of their role in local democracy", January 14th, 2009, Durrës.

²¹ Mira Veizi, Former Head of Municipality Unit Nr.10, Tirana

the CL is playing the role of the basic chain that makes possible direct connections and contacts of citizens with their locally elected representatives.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The experience summarized in this publication, remarking the goals and aims of IDM as regards the promotion and reshaping of the concept of CL's role in the local democracy, makes us understand the necessity for addressing a certain amount of important issues and challenges in the local and central level. The concerns covered in this handbook, that in the same time represents the goals that IDM undertook while implementing the project in the Municipality of Durrës, for many reasons remain in the process of fulfillment and can be achieved only by full determination and engagement of all the actors and groups of interest.

Often we (IDM), as the main actor in stimulating these changes, have asked ourselves if this enterprise is worthy, considering the energies devoted for this venture. Nonetheless, on the other hand, neither the challenges nor the faced difficulties do not constitute a proper argument in favor of inactivity, apathy and avoidance of

responsibilities, like commonly has happened in Albania in the last decade. As a consequence, IDM will always insist, for establishing sustainable and democratic change in this approach towards transparent governance with a wider civic participation.

The priorities that we can distinguish of exceptional importance are the implantation of some established criteria regarding the selection manner of CLs structure and especially the careful deployment between the local government and the citizens. The experiences in Shkodra and Tirana, and notably the successful conduct of Durrës' project; the support that local public and non-public actors have provided including the citizens, make us understand how important is this connecting chain between citizens and state's institutions for fulfilling the government challenges, for the development and empowerment of local communities, improvement of social cohesion and citizen's participation in the political decision making process.

In an analysis that IDM has recently carried out concerning three years activity in the field of promoting and establishing the CL structure and community based organizations, is once more confirmed the importance of this inter-institutional organization in the service of a local community oriented democratic governance. The balance of these arguments regarding the dilemmas that this enterprise represents is clearly biased on the need and desire for pragmatic achievements with the aim to construct a functional democracy where the public service prevails amid conflictive political interests that characterize Albania. Some of the most crucial lessons and recommendations from IDM and foreign experience are presented as follows.

- Institutional Inclusion of the Community Liaison

In the institutional context of the local governance, it remains a necessity the definition of a clear vision and at the same time the education of the Municipality's executive staff concerning the vital role of CLs as related to governance improvements at all the levels. The successful experience brought forward from the Municipality of Durrës, gives the best example regarding the preparation of a functional defined framework of duties that the CLs should look after. This would happen in close collaboration with leading staff of different departments in the Municipality of Durrës, aspiring to bring closer the CLs with necessary information and knowledge, how to better serve the community in improving citizen's services. As a result, an important issue in this perspective remains the need to prepare both the CL staff and public administration, through different trainings and capacity building guidance. This will result in reciprocal benefits through closer collaboration, without overlapping the competences of municipality institutions. In this regard, it is essential to stress the importance of capacity building of other governmental institutions' public administration operating at the central level. This intends to raise the partnership and collaboration with CL instrument and as consequence may spark a wider participation of citizens in governance, having a direct impact in the respect of law.

However to be realistic, there is still a lot to be done, in order to achieve the main aim, which is related to a wider engagement of Municipalities Councils in this enterprise, and all this within essential reasons. The Municipality Council that approves the annual budget for this structure, can approve even the selecting criteria for CL candidates, a process that still is better to pass through the consent of the inhabitants of neighborhoods

or urban areas in which the CL carries out his/her activity. In the same path, it can be argued that the Municipality Council should define the functional duties of this structure.

Within this framework, still future challenges remain in the efforts for capacity building of the CL structure as an organizer, and in particular in issues that concern participatory budgeting, stimulation in the process of creating groups of community interest, lobbying and advocacy in the protection of citizens' public interest, transparency of public funds, creation of civic representative boards (Community Based Group) etc.

Based on the above mentioned discussions, and at the same time on the future objectives and visions of IDM, would be of explicit importance and benefit, the establishment of a training school targeting future and current CLs staff. This school would offer intensive, adequate and qualified information and knowledge on the functions of CL positions, conduct of their work, evaluation of actual experiences and good practices, capacity building of this structure concerning the community development. This school would train the staff in lobbying, negotiating and advocating skills, which are of particular importance in their daily work with the citizens and public officials. The establishment and operation of this school would motivate and push forward the laying of this experience and practice in other Municipalities all over the country, where the structure of CL is still inexistent.

Following these goals, the position and the role of CL can be seen in long-term perspectives, making this structure the main promoter and supporter of democracy development directed from below. Nonetheless in the actual stage, the adequate positioning of the CL between the citizens and public institutions, remains a hard task and a realistic difficult challenge, but not unachievable. The success of this structure depends particularly on the local government leader's vision and their motivation. Consequently, we recommend more investments from local government administrators for this structure, with the aim that CL becomes an independent leader, organizer and activist of the community action, and not a mere, unknown officer who is paid on the basis of honorarium to complete the services of municipal services.

- Local and Central Government: The benefits from the Community Liaison

Traditionally, in the municipal units of Tirana, in the Municipality of Shkodra, and at the same time referring to the new practice established in Durrës through the initiative of IDM, we can safely assess that the role of CL is connected predominantly with the local government: Municipalities, Municipal Units, and Municipal Councils etc. Theoretically, with few exceptions, when we speak about civic participation in the decision making process and governance, mostly the issues under analysis are connected with local government. This might create a deadlock and remarkable absences of advantages if there does not exist a realistic vision that even the central government bodies, ministries and other institutions, directly or indirectly through representation at the local level, can cooperate in closer partnership with CLs, civic contributions organizations, or any kind of structure created on community basis. If there existed a founded, contemporary vision in the leaders of each state institution of central government regarding the important role of civic component in the law enforcement, then

it would be easy to invest in the interest of the structure of CL even from central government.

In the implementation of a large number of national strategies of various institutions like Ministry of Labor and Social Support, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Environment and especially Ministry of Interior, can be identified the provisions related to the needs in the services that CL structure can offer in execution of pertaining goals. Here we can mention the recognition of the role of CL in the implementation of a number of national strategies like; Strategy of Police, Strategy on Civil Emergencies, Strategy on Fight Against Human and Drug trafficking, Strategy Against Violence and Crime in Family etc. These strategies would not be able to achieve the required results without a productive partnership with citizen's groups or boards in urban communities.

While facing these challenges, a lot of work and efforts remain to be done concerning public education and other governing institutions, with regard to the services that the CL offers. This can happen through media campaigns and lobbying for a national approach about the role of CL in the local governance, not only by IDM means, but by other interested actors as well. The involvement for the institutionalization of CL structure from up, could have been settled through the legal definition in central government legislation, financial support from central government funds (in this case the payment for CLs could come from local budget of the municipality and in the same time from the central government funds), and technical assistance for capacity building through cooperation with represented institutions in the local level.

The issues connected with the improvements of the environment, urban development, drinking water management, prevention of crime, community policing, social support, engagement and inclusion of marginalized social groups etc, can and should successfully happen only with the participation, contribution and partnership of civic community in the processes of decision making. The COMMUNITY LIAISON is the unique contact point with the citizens, an instrument for community development and civic responsibility. As such the Community Liaison structure should be supported and developed from all the actors; state or independent organizations.