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Policy
Paper

Building Citizen Centered Policy-Making

Global Perspectives and Best Practices

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Executive Summary

The relationship between public participation and public policy making is important and interesting to explore for a variety of different reasons. As a matter of fact, in the global context, there is a greater focus on the relationship between government and the public as burning issues such as government accountability and transparency have increasingly become subject to public debate in the last decade. Civil society itself – within the scope of its mission to give voice to citizens and communities – has been the most influential factor in improved citizen-government relations. Additionally, the varying political, social and cultural contexts among countries have traditionally been fundamental in the process of citizen engagement in policy development.

There are numerous benefits associated with citizen participation in policy-making. In addition to ensuring greater transparency, accountability and legitimacy, reaching understanding between communities and decision-makers should be considered as the ultimate goal of public participation in the policy-making process. Building consensus among governments and communities eventually leads to more inclusive, democratic and most importantly, higher quality public policy, which reflects the public interest versus political agendas of various levels of government. Well-informed and inclusive public policies are more likely to promote a positive socio-economic environment, in which public confidence in institutions is instilled. Citizen participation also contributes to effective conflict resolution not only at national level, but also globally.

This paper elaborates on the process of policy-making and focuses on how citizens fit into the whole picture (or process). References are made to key actors and institutions as responsible for the effective enforcement of mechanisms and tools designed for meaningful citizen participation in policymaking via information and/or citizen consultations to ensure active participation. Information and consultations respectively represent one-way and two-way relationships, in which governments either depart or receive information and feedback from the public. Active citizen participation, on the other hand, is a relation based on partnerships with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy making.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, this paper offers a number of best practices in citizen participation in policymaking from a global perspective. The impact of citizen engagement on policy development is one of the highlights of this paper. The key findings on the relationship between citizen engagement and policy development are illustrated through data and statistics. Most significantly, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) – as the think-tank committed to the promotion of civic participation in the local decision-making processes and increasing the accountability of decision-making actors at local level vis-à-vis the citizenry through a bottom-up/top-down approach – offers its own experience in institutionalizing structures of mediation and mechanisms of social cohesion such as “community liaisons” and “community-based groups” in efforts to promote participatory governance in Albania. The Case Study is juxtaposed against and pivoted around the best practices elaborated in this paper.

Ultimately, policy options in light of the benefits of citizen involvement in policy-making are debated from a theoretical perspective thus summarizing the key findings of the policy paper.

I. Background & Context

Public participation in policy making is fundamental to governing in a democracy. In the transition to democracy, governments no longer have automatic authority but must continually re-establish their authority through responsible governing. Given that the ultimate political authority is invested in the people, government requires public participation and public deliberation to govern effectively, efficiently and with a sense of accountability toward the public at large. Governments, which actively solicit the public input in policy-making processes, are eventually able to accomplish more by virtue of public participation. Public participation also creates better public policy because local decisions are community decisions and collection effort usually results in more reasoned and well thought out decisions¹. The above constitute the basis for why the relationship between public participation and public policy making is both important and interesting to explore.

The good news is that, amidst effort to combat corruption at international level and find solutions to global financial crisis, there is a greater focus on the relationship between government and the public as burning issues such as government accountability and transparency have increasingly become subject to public debate especially in the last decade. It is exactly because of the current global situation that further exploring and researching public participation as a concept is of such a significant importance these days. Moreover, while opportunities for feedback and consultations (between government and citizens) are on the rise, large differences remain between countries with long-established traditions of citizen participation and those who have only just begun to open up government decision-making to citizens at international level²

Political context is (probably) the most influential factor around civil society-policy linkages. One of the reasons for presence of such factor is that governments do not have sufficient resources to obtain citizen input for their policy development. Other factors related to the presence of the political factor in the level of engagement of civil society in policy-making include some public officials' resistance to citizen participation in government decision-making, conflicting political interests, lack of transparency and accountability as well as the lack of legislature (especially in weak institutional systems) providing for civil society participation in public policy.

Some observers have focused their attention on issues such as capacity, competence, expertise and mobilization capacity as key internal factors affecting CSO influence on policy processes³. In addition, the social-cultural context varies from society to society in that it may be either conducive or detrimental to the process of civil society influence on policy-making. A case in point would be countries, in which tripartite partnership between government, business and trade unions (such as the case of Italy, Luxemburg and Ireland) or, in contrast, the case of Southeastern Europe where concepts such as citizen participation in government decision-making are relatively new.

¹ Adams, 1997

² Fioramonti, L. & Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

³ Court et al, 2006

In most post-communist societies of Eastern European, public participation per se has been affected by both legacies of the past as well as effects related to transitioning from dictatorial to democratic societies. After the fall of communism in these societies and following changes driven by civic groups, participation levels dropped significantly even though civil societies played a significant role in the collapse of communist government in those countries. “These experiences show that civil societies in post-communist Europe – not the least due to their anti-state ideology – seem to work better as an instrument of protest than a platform for engagement”⁴.

Other elements which have contributed to low participation rates among East European countries had do with weaknesses internal to the civil society in those countries such as poor linkages between civil society and population, elitist civil society being unresponsive to citizen needs, civil society’s poor transparency and accountability practices as well as civil societies being driven by donors. Such is the case of many civil society organizations (CSOs), which have been created in response to fundraising opportunities than as a response to populations needs, hence their presence in policy debates being questionable. “It is not surprising that, in such situation(s), CSOs often focus attention on donor priorities rather than on the needs of society”⁵.

There are various mechanisms and several degrees of public participation in the broadest sense of our concept and in policy-making in particular. While public participation is the vehicle that provides the opportunity for all segments of society to actively participate in decision-making, public policy is a much larger concept that implies societal or community policy – a consensus of the government and the governed. Indeed, citizens participate in their society in a variety of different ways. They express their wishes and demands by signing petitions and boycotting products; they support specific claims and interests by donating money, they contribute to charity and assist their relatives and neighbors; they join clubs and associations to reach collective goals and they may engage in city renewal programs to improve the quality of life in their localities⁶. In fact the repertoire of citizen’s activities in civil society is virtually unlimited. Over the last decades, many countries have witnessed an unprecedented rise in the number of people engaged in a myriad of such activities as well as the continuous expansion of models of participation in policy making.

In order to engage the citizen participation in policy making, we must look at ways how government can and should actively disseminate information to the citizenry – the key element in citizen participation in policy-making as well as responsibilities and obligations which citizens themselves should be cognizant of in order to ensure meaningful participation in consultations for policy-making. Access to information requires sound legislation, clear institutional mechanisms for its application and independent oversight institutions and judiciary for enforcement. Finally, it requires citizens to know and understand their rights – and to be willing and able to accept them⁷. While aided by a rapidly developing information technology, public access to information for purposes of participation in policy-making would, of course, be restricted to information, which does not normally compromise confidentiality of information departed to the public.

⁴ Fioramonti, L. & Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

⁵ Carothers, 2000

⁶ Fioramonti, L. & Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

⁷ Caddy J. & Vergez C., 2001

Most significantly, public participation can be both “passive” and “active”. “Passive” participation happens when governments disseminate information in a one-way mode whereas, by definition, active participation is regarded as a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making... . It (active participation) recognizes the capacity of citizens to discuss and generate policy options independently. It requires governments to share in agenda setting and to ensure that policy proposals generated jointly will be taken into account in reaching a final decision.”⁸ In other words, active participation means that, in addition to government and communities reaching a consensus on the use of limited resources, everyone in the community is allowed the opportunity to have a say in how their taxes are spent.

However, given that public participation does not lead to conclusive results, it is important that proper attention is paid to effects of communication on public participation and hence, on policy-making. While communication is, at times, one-sided thus taking the form of a mere transfer of information, public participation per se is two-way, and often times multi-dimensional communication. Without communication and public participation, there will be irreconcilable differences between government responsible for policy-making and communities benefiting from it; with communication and public participation, a consensus can be reached for the allocation of limited resources. In formulating, drafting and making policy, communication assume a particular importance in the policy making process since it serves as it serves the link between identifying policy issues and discussing it with parties involved. This is usually carried out through consultations with citizenry, which as is the case of public participation is a two-way process.

II. Why is Citizen Participation in Policy-Making Important

The process of public participation in policy-making is extremely important. As a matter of fact, the benefits of public participation come along during the process itself but, above all, public participation creates better policy because local decisions are local decisions and collective effort usually results in more reasoned and well thought out decisions⁹. However, there is no one single definition of public participation in policy-making; on the other hand, the unique characteristic of public participation is that it does not lead to final conclusions or decisions.

There are numerous benefits associated with citizen participation in policy-making. On the premise that the ideal goal of public participation is to help build consensus among government and communities with regard to decisions affecting public interest, public participation can lead to a number of firsthand benefits. In addition to consensus building, it can help to diffuse conflicts, decentralize power and generate effective, quick decisions benefiting the public at large.

Even when consensus cannot be reached, efforts to engage the public in decision-making might have secondary, indirect benefits such as avoidance of future inherent conflicts between

⁸ Caddy, J. & Vergez, C., 2001

⁹ Adams, J., 1997

communities and policy-makers; building relationships not only between the latter but also among all actors involved in policy debate; ensuring that decisions made bear some relevance to the needs of the community, which, in itself, can feel proud and empowered just by being invited to participate in policy-making. Above all and most importantly, reaching understanding between communities and decision-makers – not simply reaching consensus – should be the ultimate goal of public participation as a value-adding element in the policy-making process.

Building consensus among governments and communities eventually leads to more inclusive, democratic and most importantly higher quality public policy, which reflects the public interest versus political agendas of various levels of government. Well-informed and inclusive public policies are more likely to promote a positive socio-economic environment, in which public confidence in institutions is instilled. In addition, strengthening government relations with citizens may be seen a sound investment in tapping new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and sources for implementation¹⁰. Therefore, many progressive governments today view building better relations with their citizens as an investment and citizen attitudes through their input in government policies as ‘return on the investment’.

Citizen participation also contributes to effective conflict resolution not only in terms of global policy making, but more specifically, in terms of global human security. The effective representation and participation of citizens in the decision-making processes of global institutions, including those involved in responding to conflict, introduces a new level of democratic accountability to policies formulated to foster human security, including the potential use of coercive force. Experience from emerging democratic processes at national and regional levels has shown that the introduction of citizens’ representative bodies has significantly contributed to negotiating and resolving contentious issues, reducing the perceived legitimacy of and the de facto recourse to the use of armed force¹¹.

Transparency and accountability should also be considered both as direct and indirect benefit of citizen participation in policy-making. Of course, transparency being a complex and fluid notion in itself, it requires that the citizens demonstrate commitment to the policy process by exploring all available sources of information so their participation leads to well-informed policy decisions. Therefore, access to information, consultation and active participation in policy-making contributes to good governance by fostering greater transparency in policy-making; more accountability through direct public scrutiny and oversight; enhanced legitimacy of government decision-making processes; better quality policy decisions based on a wider range of information sources; and, finally, higher levels of implementation and compliance given greater public awareness of policies and participation in their design¹².

Lastly, but most importantly, public participation is beneficial to consolidating *good governance* through application of modern and more effective concepts and practices such as active participation (versus mere consultations with citizens), tripartite partite partnerships as well as introduction of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) in countries where

¹⁰ Caddy J. & Vergez C. , 2001

¹¹ LogoLink International Workshop on Resources: Citizen Engagement and Democratic Local Governance, 2004

¹² Caddy J. & Vergez C. , 2001

such concepts and practices have completely lacked in the past as is the case of post-communist countries.

III. Public Participation: Actors and Challenges

The debate over the process of public participation in policy-making would not make any sense without an in-depth discussion of the role of some of the key actors involved in the process as well as the interaction among these actors as conducive to a meaningful public participation process. The range of actors who get involved and facilitate the process of citizen participation in decision-making is quite broad.

Theoreticians and practitioners who conceptualize public participation as a public dialogue believe that the actors who participate in policy debate and decision-making including common citizenry, individual citizens, interest groups, not-for-profit organizations, media, social and professional association, etc) – all of whom are characterized by various degrees of such participation – buy into the philosophy that, at a minimum, all citizens have the right to be informed about their government and to make an individual decision about their level of participation in the government decision making process¹³.

First and foremost, *citizens* constitute the most significant stakeholder in the gamut of actors participating in the policy-making process. Broadly speaking, there are two main types of citizen participation: participation through non-partisan community activities or participation through involvement in civic, professional and volunteer associations. However, these two broad types of participation are always conditioned by the geo-political and socio-cultural context in which civil society operates. In certain societies, participation through collective community action is more common. In some others, membership in professional or civic societies is more typical.

However, citizen participation should not be viewed as a philosophical concept. The application of the concept would not be effective unless citizens themselves demonstrate their willingness to actively participate not in the policy process, but also in ensuring that they are engaged in all political processes relevant to the functioning of the government. In other words, citizens themselves have their own obligations to ensure that their participation is meaningful. Such obligations do not only include civic responsibilities such as voting but also civic initiatives to consistently hold government responsible for its activities either through individual actions or through collective efforts such as directing petitions to government, mobilizing public meetings and through participating in civil society movements (to be discussed below). All these forms or civic participation can have a tremendous impact on the stages of public policy development especially when it comes to debating various policy alternatives in which the public has a direct, vested interest.

Government is a key actor is ensuring that public input is consistently solicited and reflected in any policy debate and decision-making process. It is the responsibility of government

¹³ Adams, J., 1997

to make every effort to engage citizens in public dialog both directly and through society's institution. Without government's active solicitation of the public concerns, government is likely to hear from citizens only when they have a complaint about government¹⁴. Some typical ways, in which governments can perform their public participation obligations (to the citizenry) include institutionalizing citizen participation by holding public hearings or open meetings on given government actions, development and/or infrastructure projects/proposals as well as hearings on the municipal budget allocations (in the case of local government).

Simultaneously, governments can also apply more traditional methods through which government's attention to community and citizen concerns is demonstrated such as ensuring that responding to citizen complaints and requests for information is timely and effective. In certain cases, government also plays a key role on institutionalizing citizen structures such as citizen advisory boards. Alternately, governments can also use media and publications to ensure that the public is informed of government activities and decisions; such as an effect can materialize through public officials holding news conferences, publication of newsletters or other documents on new or amended legislature affecting citizens especially at local level.

One of the means through which citizens can demonstrate their commitment to civic engagement is by participating in civil society either through *not-for-profit organizations* or other types of associations, such as interest groups, community-based groups (CBOs), professional societies, etc. The unique characteristic of non-profits is that they serve as a focal point where the citizenry can voice their specific concerns yet in a setting which combines a sense of community activism and specialized knowledge and expertise on public policy alternatives. From another standpoint, non-governmental organizations are considered to be a significant mechanism through which the citizenry communicates with the government for purposes of jointly debating and establishing public policies.

The key challenge is how all the aforementioned actors interact and communicate with each-other in order to collectively contribute to an effective policy development process. As discussed earlier, public participation is a two-way communication concept. It is, in fact, communication which constitutes the most significant challenge in the interaction between government and the citizenry. Such a challenge exists because, often times, both parties do not properly understand each-other's positions, obligations and responsibilities. Effective interaction and communication between all these actors requires not only a clear understanding of each-other's roles; above all, it demands demonstration of values such as respect, tolerance and willingness to weigh out differences for the sake of establishing public policy based on consensus between government and the public.

In addition to communication and interaction, other challenges which impede a good interaction between governments and citizens have to do not only with the lack of traditions but also with social and economic factors underlying the big difference between citizen participation and political activism respectively in developed and less developed countries. While political participation depends mainly on resources, trust and the absence of legal measures, civil

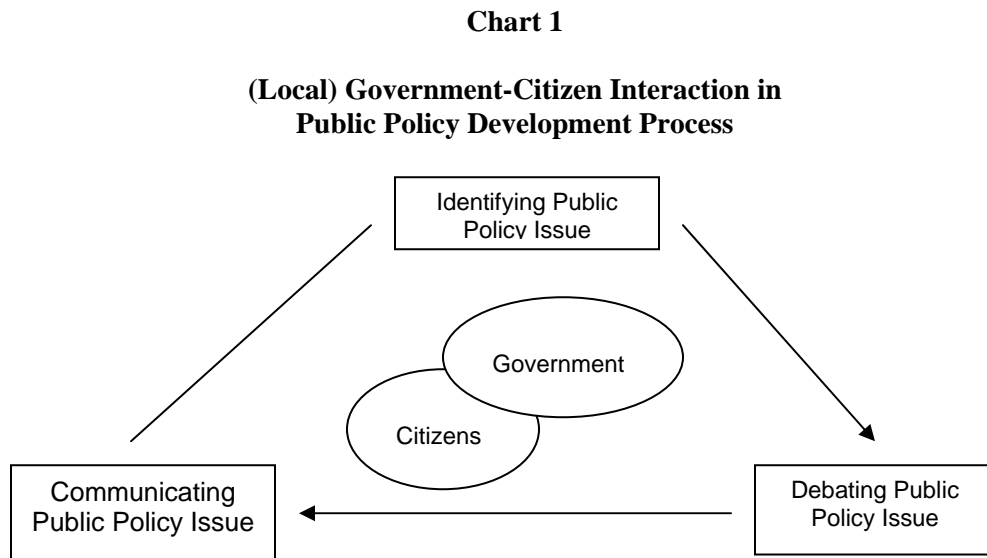
¹⁴ Adams, J., 1997

participation is strongly related to the socioeconomic development of a country and the existence of a favorable legal environment¹⁵.

Globalization, the advent of new technologies (such as e-government) in citizen participation coupled with concerns over protection of privacy rights as well as the interdependence of policy-making processes requiring effective harmonization of local and national policies with policy-making at international level (such is the case of involvement of citizens in global anti-terrorism initiatives) currently pose significant challenges in terms of the debate over the relationship between public participation and policy. Challenges underpinning the future of the successful application of concepts and practices related citizen participation in policy-making have to do with the fact that, while government-citizen relations have been subject to profound transformations over the past decade, they are likely to undergo even greater change in the next¹⁶

IV. Policy Process and Citizen Participation

Despite the commonly known fact that citizens are not equally affected by national policy-making, it is debatable whether, based on the premise that they interact more with local government, they are more affected by national policies or those made at the local level. No matter what the influence of intergovernmental relations is on citizens, policy-making is based on a standard process and follows a commonly accepted cycle. From a technical standpoint, the interaction between any level of government and citizens is illustrated through Chart 1 below:

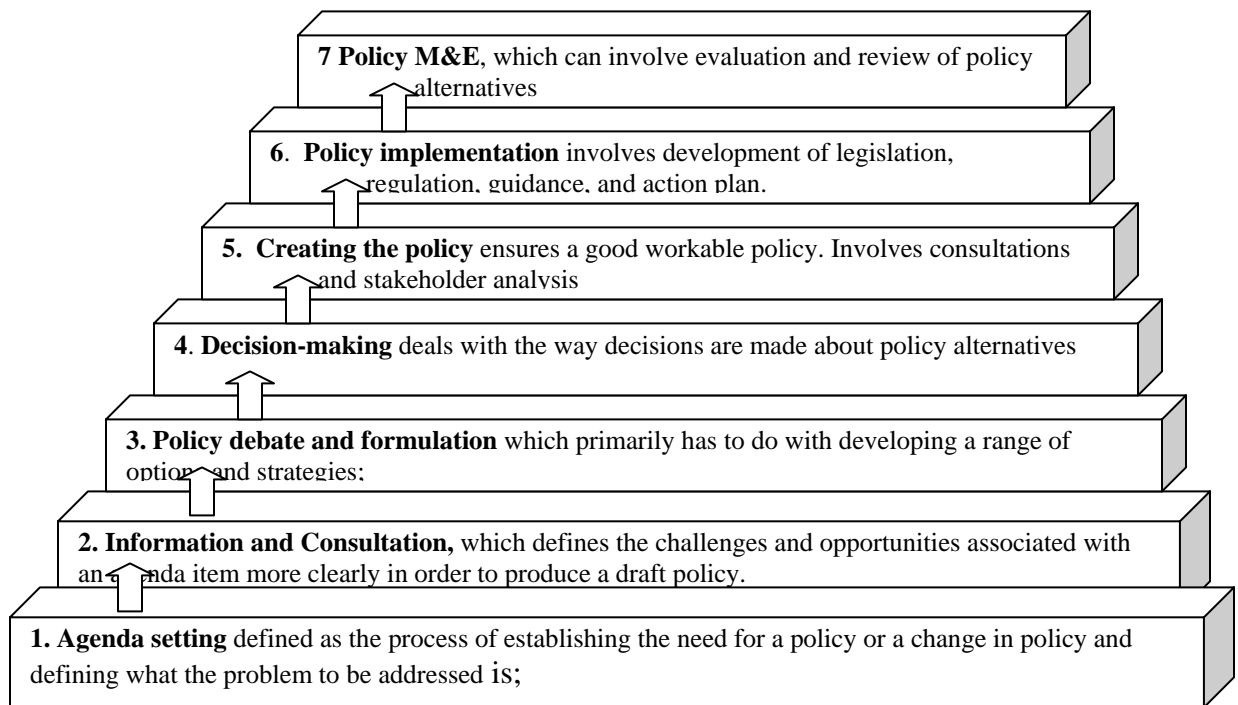


¹⁵ Fioramonti, L. & Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

¹⁶ Cady J. & Vergez, C., 2001

As mentioned earlier, citizens can participate in government policy-making in a variety of different ways. However, the policy process is usually composed of the following components: agenda setting, information analysis and consultation, policy debate and formulation, decision-making, creating the policy, policy implementation and policy monitoring and evaluation. *Figure 1* below details, in a reverse chronological order, each of the stages of policy making thus providing a broad definition of activities under each stage.

Figure 1



It is important to emphasize that, of the above 7 stages, the one with which the notion of citizen participation in policy-making is mostly concerned is ‘information and consultation stage. While this can include: gathering evidence and knowledge from a range of sources including citizens and civil society organizations, understanding the context including the political implication for the agenda item, a distinction should be drawn between *information and consultation*, on the one hand and *active citizen participation* on the other.

Information and consultations respectively represent one-way and two-way relationships, in which governments either depart or receive information and feedback from the public. Active citizen participation, on the other hand, is a relation based on partnerships with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy making. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision on policy formulation rests with government¹⁷.

¹⁷ Caddy, J. & Vergez, C., 2001

V. *Principles, Mechanisms and Tools*

The guiding principles underlying the concept of citizen participation in decision – making point towards government as the promoter of policy ideas and human capital necessary to implement those ideas. Therefore, governments are globally under pressure to create the necessary environment and conditions for citizen to have their say in the development of public policies. On the other hand, active participation is consistently required in order enhance the visibility and legitimacy of government’s role in soliciting public input in policy-making. This is exactly how consensus in agenda-setting between government and the public is brought about. In other words, some basic principles upon which active participation (or citizen engagement) is based include sharing agenda setting for all participants, a relaxed timeframe for deliberation, an emphasis on value-sharing rather than debate and consultative practices based on inclusiveness, courtesy and respect¹⁸.

From a global perspective, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) outlines some of the key principles for ensuring that citizen participation in policy making is done in a way which combines the right of citizens to information from governments and with the role of the latter in ensuring that public feedback through consultations and active citizen participation lead to overall good governance. Some of these principles include commitment from all actors involved (government, citizens, interest groups, etc), recognition of the right of citizens not only to access to information but to actively participate in policy-making, clarity in definition the rules of government-citizen interaction including objectives and limits to consultations for purposes of developing public policy; time and resources required for the institutionalization of public participation in policy development; coordination among government units and citizens to ensure that public consultations and feedback are meaningful and effective; accountability on the part of the government in order to ensure that the policy making process is transparent and open not only to public scrutiny but also to evaluation. Active participation versus mere information-sharing or public consultation is another key guiding principle for effective citizen participation in developing policy.

It would be challenging for any actors and stakeholders involved in the process of policy-making, be they governmental, non-governmental or from the private sector, to demonstrate commitment to reflect the above-mentioned guiding principles without the necessary mechanisms in place. Specifically, these mechanisms include *legislation, policies* and *institutions* whose entirety needs to be directly and transparently connected to policymakers via cooperation, complementarity and collaboration¹⁹. All these actors responsible for consultation with and feedback from the citizenry for policies – a situation, which varies depending on attitudes, capacities, incentives among public officials, the extent of civil and political freedoms, local history and power relations in different countries – are all influential for the way in which policy is implemented²⁰.

Tools for citizen participation are needed to support citizens’ access to information on demand (passive provision of information) and government’s efforts to disseminate information

¹⁸ Edgar L., Marshall C. and Bassett M, 2006

¹⁹ Coston, J., 1998

²⁰ Kingdon, J.W., 1984

(active provision of information). The choice of approaches and tools available will depend upon the objectives, financial resources and human capacity of the government unit concerned²¹. These tools may represent mere information products for citizens or more customized forums intended to involve citizens in policy-making. Some of such tools, information products or forums are:

- *Annual reports*, which governments can publicize in effort to share information with policy stakeholders including citizens, nonprofits, community and interest groups regarding government actions in an effort to monitor and evaluate their own performance.
- *Brochures, guides, handbooks and leaflets*. In the case of local government, such a product can consist of a publication listing basic municipal functions, elected officials and phone numbers for specific services. In the case of NGOs, these products could include a listing of goals and projects. Brochures, instead, may be developed for specific audiences and could be tourist brochures, economic development guides, etc.
- *Catalogues, indexes, registers*, which allow citizens to identify and locate information materials produced by public administration units²².
- *Direct Mailing* consisting of policy related letters, leaflets, brochures, etc. delivered to citizens via post.
- *Information Centers*, which could consist in a complex of public offices offering a wide range of information service, or a 'one-stop shop' where citizen can address all their questions, comments and/or complaints on a given public policy.
- *Telephone Services*. Public administration units utilize automatic telephone numbers or call centers where citizens can call for questions, comments and/or complaints on a given public policy.
- *Public speeches* with all types of audiences and constituencies are an important and common vehicle of communicating with the public on policy issues. Public officials need be accessible so they know what issues are of concern to citizens and communicate directly with them; public speeches represent an effective tool to address this need.
- *Public and special events*. Several forms of public or special events (fairs, exhibitions, 'question & answer' sessions, etc) have proven to be effective environments in which to explain government actions thus keeping citizens involved in public policy-making.
- *Media, both written and electronic*, TV and radio are considered to traditional but highly effective means of information for citizen (via news conferences, public

²¹ Caddy, J. & Vergez C., 2001

²² Caddy, J. & Vergez C., 2001

debates, press releases) in light of government's effort to keep the public not just informed of, but also involved in the policy-making process.

- *Public opinion polls/surveys* are useful to measure public opinion and/or attitudes. Quite often, public perception is quite different from an organization's or the government's perception. The government may learn, through public opinion polls/surveys, that they and the public do not have the same stand on a policy issue.
- *Public hearings or public sessions* represent open public meetings where public administration units present new legislation, policy proposals or budget allocation plans in an effort to create an environment where citizens feel free to provide feedback and share their views and/or concerns on specific policy areas.
- *Public briefings*, unlike public meetings, are a type of meeting where the presenters provide a brief explanation or background material of a policy issue to a particular audience. It is less formal than and is held prior to a news conference or a public meeting.
- *Tri-partite forums*, which represent a public forum with the participation of government agencies, civil society and business representative brought together to debate public policy alternatives.
- *Focus Groups* allow for the collection of comments and suggestions from representatives of certain target groups with a specific interest in a policy proposal or decision.
- *Citizen Forums and Juries*²³. The former provides a means to deliver policy proposals generated by citizens or their representative organizations directly to policy-makers whereas the latter represents a group of citizens questioning expert opinion on certain policy areas.
- *Citizen panels** represent a permanent group of representatives from a target group (youth, for instance) regularly consulted by the government on various policy issues²⁴.
- *ICTs (email lists, online chat events, online discussion fora, etc.)* provide new opportunities for government to receive feedback from, and consult with individual citizens directly during policy-making – without the mediation of elected politicians or civil society organizations.

²³ Caddy J. & Vergez C., 2001

²⁴ Caddy J. & Vergez C., 2001

* As opposed to 'Citizen Panels', there is *Advisory committees*, are composed of a group representing a particular set of interests are appointed by government to provide feedback in the development of policies by interacting with wider constituencies they represent

VI. *Impact of Citizen Participation on Policy: Data & Statistics*

As the section below ‘Best Practices’ (with regard to citizen participation for policy-making) will describe, there are a variety of ways in which various mechanisms including government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, interest groups, etc. can promote citizen participation in policy-making. It is not just the variety of institutions which have a direct (or indirect impact), but most importantly the gamut of mediums and tools which makes concepts related to promote citizen involvement in policy development so interesting to research and analyze. Such variety includes information products (mailings, leaflets, public announcements, etc.), formalized structures for government-citizen relations (citizen panels, advisory committees, etc) or more democratic and modern tools for good governance (participatory budgeting, etc.).

But the most interesting aspect of researching and analyzing citizen involvement in policy-making is the influence of social, political and historical environment on the development of civil society, hence the evolvement and advancement of citizen engagement by policy area in various parts of the world. In addition, the immense diversity of the forms of civic activism (and their impact on policy), for the most part, reflect the wide variety of contexts, current trends and future challenges. For example, the analysis of the highly politicized and contentious nature of most Latin American civil societies paints a fundamentally different picture from the assessment of European civil societies’ “somewhat cozy relationship with the state.” Similarly, rapid socio-economic development and rising social inequity define civil society’s current challenges in the Asia-Pacific area, while in most other regions civil society is confronted with either pervasive or persistent poverty (sub-Saharan Africa) or the decline of the welfare state (Western and Southern Europe)²⁵.

In order to corroborate the above, this paper utilizes an analysis of disaggregated data by policy area – human rights, social policy and national budget – conducted by CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society (2007), which reveals that civil society’s impact not only varies by country but also by policy sector (Table 1):

Table 1. Policy Impact by World Region and Policy Area

Region	Human Rights	Social Policy	National Budget %
Latin America	2.1	1.9	1.0
Western and Southern Europe	2.4	2.4	1.2
Post-communist Europe	1.8	1.7	0.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.5	1.7	1.2
Asia	1.9	1.6	1.2
Middle East and Mediterranean	1.6	1.4	0.8
<i>Average</i>	<i>1.9</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>1.0</i>

²⁵ Fioramonti, L. & Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

VII. *Best Practices and Models*

Several analytic reports rank civil society in various regions or countries by their level of participation in policy-making. Dynamics characterizing the involvement of citizens in policy making in Central and East European countries, for instance, have to do with historical development of civil societies in post-communist Europe and challenges including legacies of their communist pasts, difficulties in transitions to democracy and market economy, problematic relationships with governments as well as weak relationships to the private sector.

Although, by statistics, there are exceptions among countries in the Central and East European region as regards the involvement of civil society in decision-making (such is the case of Czech Republic and Slovenia, for instance), it is probably best if references are made also to other regions and specific countries with best practices in the area of civic engagement in government decision- or policy-making.

Based on a in-depth literature review, this paper outlines a number of best practices of citizen participation tacked from various perspectives and illustrated through various media and mechanisms, most of which are discussed theoretically in the above part referred to as ‘Citizen participation: Mechanisms and Tools’.

The right of citizens to be informed and educated is crucial to the linkage between civil participation and policy-making. **Canada**, for instance, is renowned for its systematic, committed and institutional efforts to ensure citizen participation in policy-making:

The Canadian Government’s Department of Health, for instance, publicizes a Manual referred to as ‘Policy Toolkit for Public involvement in Decision-Making’. The Manual sets out the Department’s policy and defines (five) levels of public involvement in terms of the overall objective: to inform, to gather information, to discuss, to engage and to partner. For each level, a set of techniques and a case study are offered to illustrate their use in practice. Each technique is described in terms of its application, costs and limits²⁶.

In certain cases, civil society activism demonstrates itself in the form of socio-political activism and is characterized by cooperation, which has its direct influence on policy-making. Such is the case of **South Korea**.

In South Korea, advocacy organizations enjoy regular interaction with state institutions and manage to influence policymaking and holds government to account. Here, civil society groups often come together to advocate on social and political issues, such as Nakseon movement in 2000, which rejected corrupt candidates for the general elections²⁷. South Korean CSOs tend to utilize solidarity strategies for agenda-setting and political mobilization through campaigns, petitions, boycotts and demonstrations... to advocate on social and political issues.

The **USA** models accentuate more institutionalized forms of citizen participation with direct impact on policy-making.

²⁶ Caddy, J. and Vergez C., 2001

²⁷ Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

Public sessions of city council, public hearings and budget hearings are several of the tools U.S. city councils can incorporate into their formal agenda to institutionalize public participation. Many city councils set aside time on the council agenda for the public to directly address the council. City councils may also hold public hearings as part of their agenda in order to gather facts and opinions on proposed legislation, ascertain public opinion on and to provide for media coverage of an issue.

ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) find their ways in many Western countries where the Internet is used as a means to connect the public to the government and ensure the engagement of the former in policy-making. For instance:

*In **United Kingdom**, the government has created a portal designed as a potential key resource for citizen-to-government and citizen-to-citizen interaction. This has been referred to as ‘Citizen Space’ and the main purpose of the feature is to provide a gateway to government consultations, facilitate public discussions of policy issues, offer useful political and civic information that can help citizens navigate government as well as to create a space for e-government.*

In certain other cases, the effects of citizen participation on policy making are closely linked with the internal capacities of civil society and a good climate of CSO-government relations:

*The case of **Ghana** in sub-Saharan Africa is a case in point. The data and comments gathered through the ‘Global Survey of the State of Civil Society’ by CSI highlight that civil society in Ghana has a relatively high impact on public policy due to the existence of professional CSOs with significant skills and capacity in policy engagement and a rather open government, whose collaboration has greatly contributed to the economic and social development of a target group, that of women..*

Participatory budgeting is another case in point, where citizen involvement in policy making is best demonstrated and materialized. In Medellin, **Columbia**, for example, the Communal Consultative Council (CCC), as central part of the participatory budget process was constituted in an encounter space of civic reflection on the local development, a space of acknowledgement and deliberation, and as a space for deciding and making agreements between the municipal government and local communities:

The CCC in Medellin, Columbia ensured the participation of more than 1484 participant organizations in the participatory budget meeting. It was characterized by a high presence of social capital. The PPBP in Medellín is framed into a general policy that seeks to allocate resources to poorest communities and to encourage their political participation in the city development. The effect has included allocation of resources to each community based on an account of the Human Development Index and the number of inhabitants per community. The most important accomplishment was that, through participative planning and budgeting, citizens are more confident about their own capacities without resorting to political intrigues²⁸.

There exist also sporadic cases when organizations such as CSOs – although traditionally focused on their role as welfare providers – are moving away from such role thus increasingly

²⁸ LogoLink International Workshop on Resources: Citizen Engagement and Democratic Local Governance, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 6-9 December 2004

becoming active in advocacy and citizen mobilization as is the case of **Hong Kong** detailed below:

The CSI (Civil Society Index)' Global Survey of the State of Civil Society reveals that Hong Kong's civil society has a strong impact on society, most significantly in its social service provision role, particularly with regard to marginalized groups. Although this tradition continues today, many CSOs have recently taken on new roles, particularly with regard to shaping the public agenda and challenging public policy. CSOs' ability to influence public policy has been successful in specific areas such as human rights policies. On July 1, 2003, to channel citizen's dissatisfaction with antiterrorism legislation seen as posing serious threats to civil liberties, CSOs brought together half a million people to protest, which caused the government to delay the implementation of the law and ultimately, to withdraw it altogether for the time being²⁹.

In other cases, it is a mediating structure similar to that of the 'community liaison' launched through IDM efforts (to be detailed in the 'Case Study' section), which ensures that not only conflict is resolved between government and the public, but that the public contributes to government policy reform:

*An example of this is the role of the 'Mediator of the Republic' in the **French** concept of 'Institutions for Oversight'³⁰. According to this practice, the Mediator of the Republic has, since 1973, been responsible for reaching out-of-court settlements of conflicts between citizens and administration as a whole. However, (even though) the Mediator cannot intervene if the case has been brought before a judge or if the complaint deals with a disagreement between the administration and a public official, the Mediator formulates and submits proposals for reform to public authorities, thereby contributing to improvement government relations with citizens.*

Certain segments of civil society – such as trade unions and professional associations in **Czech Republic** – may have a tremendous impact on policy making in specific areas thanks to their ability to foster congenial relations with the government:

Civil society (in Czech Republic) plays an important role in influencing public policy and engaging with government on policy issues. The CSI findings identify two particularly important areas of CSO policy influence, namely environmental protection and social services. CSOs working on these issues have succeeded in placing their demands on the public agenda, as, for example, with the Social Services Act. In addition, trade unions and professional and economic associations are traditionally active and successful in influencing public policies at the national level. Civil society owes much of its success in influencing the policy agenda to the generally cooperative and amicable relations with the government³¹.

²⁹ Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

³⁰ Caddy J. and Vergez, C., 2001

³¹ Heinrich, V. Finn, 2007

XIII. Country Case Study: Efforts by IDM - Albania

As a think-tank committed to the promotion of civic participation in the local decision-making processes and increasing the accountability of decision-making actors at local level vis-à-vis the citizenry through a bottom-up/top-down approach, IDM has been working together with local government units in strengthening their capacities to interact better with communities as well as with civic structures in order to raise their awareness about their role as key actors in sustainable development and good governance.

IDM, being a pioneer in instigating and institutionalizing structures of mediation and mechanisms of social cohesion such as “community liaisons” and “community-based groups” strongly believes that no real tangible progress would be achieved without a full and consolidated perspective that includes citizens’ active involvement in improvement of the quality of life in community, cultural absorption of civic responsibilities, improvement of law enforcement through citizens partnership, fighting corruption as a societal moral responsibility, improving accountability as a civic demand, leading public and private sector partnership with citizens’ groups, developing social profile of private businesses, developing networks of mediating structures etc. that would make citizens feel empowered and active participants in the democratic processes. Indeed the above mentioned structures serve not only to the facilitate communication among community, local government, business and various interest groups, but assume significant important in multi-ethnic societies where such structures can help reduce conflict and ensure law enforcement.

The Case Study below highlights some of the accomplishments and challenges undertaken by IDM in this respect:

As promoted by IDM, the *Community Liaison* structure, for instance, is a sustainable model that involves citizens in the agenda setting process. This structure is based on an archetypal Albanian practice and is already operating in the cities of Shkodra, Tirana and Durrës. For more than two years now the idea on the role of the Community Liaison in local democracy has been important part of IDM’s objectives to raise awareness and at the same time integrate attention of all stakeholders at the local and national level on the re-evaluation and re-dimensioning of such a structure with the aim of enabling it to face the new challenges of the Albanian reality at the local level. IDM’s efforts for local mobilization and decentralization in cooperation with the Albanian Ministry of Interior³² are encouraging local governments throughout Albania to institutionalize this structure that as such would stand between the citizens and local structures for the mobilization and organization of community; development of local partnerships and stimulation of dynamic interaction.

On the premise that the *Community Liaison* structure does not substitute other institutions, IDM encourages all local partners to consider this structure as a facilitator, promoter, supporter, informer and orienteer. Looking upon this structure as such would improve

³² On this purpose, IDM’s Executive Director and the Deputy Minister of Interior have signed a joint letter which guides local government representatives to include the CL position on their structures, as a useful and efficient means for local democracy.

implementation of all components provided by the organic law of local governance or other institutions and related to community involvement and support. Above all the Community Liaison's role is to represent the community's voice in the local making decision process; improve the reciprocal communication between the local government structures and the community; organize the community in taking civic responsibility and develop partnerships with the institutions interested in the law enforcement at the local level.

Through the valuable contribution of the existing Community Liaisons³³, IDM has been able to successfully promote its experience of community mobilization in the city of Shkodra from setting up Community-Based Groups to their operation in the field through various activities. Now that in Shkodra there is a consolidated experience in community mobilization and citizens' participation, the structure of Community Liaison should be re-dimensioned in order to face new challenges of a grass-root democracy development. IDM considers the role of Community Liaison in Shkodra as an instrument for reaching social cohesion through governance at both central and local level. Based on an improved infrastructure of cooperation between local structures and the community in Shkodra and recognizing the well reputed position of Community Liaison in this city, IDM intends to further build the capacities of this structure by so transforming it into a neuralgic structure connecting citizens with their government.

The model has already been successfully introduced in the city of Durrës, where the structure was inexistent, and with substantial contribution of the Municipality itself. The initiative in Durres was quite challenging, considering the fact the structure of the Community Liaison, though permissible by law, was not established. Thus, IDM's effort concentrated since the beginning on the establishment of clear and transparent selection criteria of the Community Liaisons, consisting of a procedure that would join together the public consent for their selection and the Municipal Council Decision for their appointment. Presently, 6 Community Liaisons operate in the Municipality of Durres, with a specific budget allocated for this structure establishment and operation by the Municipality itself, and at present the respective CLs are obtaining IDM's technical assistance and training on best approaches to interaction with the community as well as other public and private stakeholders operating in the city of Durres.

This best practice in Durres is intended to now be transferred to the capital, Tirana Municipality and its 11 municipal units, which holds the structure of the Community Liaison³⁴ since year 1994, although with great drawbacks and lack of expertise for many of the involved persons managing or implementing the structure. The Municipality of Tirana is the country's biggest municipality and its organization and functioning is based on a specific law. It is divided into 11 municipal units that cover all its population (each municipal units provides services to populations ranging from 60, 000 to 100,000 inhabitants). The 11 municipal units have created their association represented each by its respective Mayor. In order to bridge gaps between the administration and its citizens, Tirana Municipality has approved since 1994 a decision that recognizes the right to each municipal unit chief executive to employ on part time basis Community Liaisons (CL) who receives a certain amount of monthly honorarium (fee) for their

³³ 22 Community Liaisons in Total

³⁴ There approximately 222 CL-s in all Tirana 11 municipal units

services. (One Community Liaison is responsible for one specific urban area). The total number of Community Liaisons in Tirana reaches to maximum 222 employees, and there is a constant demand by the Association of Municipality Units to persuade Tirana Municipal Council to increase their number and their amount of honorarium per month. This request reflects two issues: first, the importance of such a structure, and the enhancement of their role as Tirana grows in population but also improvement of services to the citizens.

In order to fully and thoroughly consider the structure and role of the Community Liaison generally in Albania and particularly in Tirana, IDM has carried out a survey³⁵ among the community in the city of Tirana to clearly understand their perception on the CL structure, ways to improve its role in the services offered to the community but also to assess its feasible recognition in the community. This survey was later followed by a series of Focus Group Discussions³⁶ with Tirana's Community Liaisons themselves for the elaboration of various issues of interest to the work of this structure, such as: selection criteria, job description, remuneration and possible capacity building.

Community Based Groups (CBGs) represent another efficient tool leading to participatory governance and greater civic involvement in the local policy and decision making processes. IDM has a long experience in the field and has so far successfully implemented various related projects in the cities of Laç, Bajram Curri and Shkodra. From 2006, IDM created 10 CBG-s in different 2 Administrative Units in Shkodra in a project supported by BTD (Balkan Trust for Democracy). Through IDM awareness facilitation and technical assistance, 85 members of CBGs have acquired the necessary skills for community organization and mobilization as well as for the elaboration of several projects that involve cooperation with various institutions and organizations, thus enhancing participatory governance. It was upon IDM initiative that a Community Center close to the Administrative Unit was set up in order to make the Center accessible to the community and other stakeholders.

In this Community Center, the Mayor of Shkodra signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the CBG-s for shared responsibilities related to services towards the community communication with the local governance. The positive pressure that CBGs applied on the representatives of the local governance is encouraging the municipality to offer premises for the continuation of the centre and inclusion within of all community initiatives of the city.

Thanks to the impact of the establishment of the CBO structure in Shkoder, the Municipality has allocated within its 2008 budget a specific fund projected for community activities. In the last two years, CBGs of Shkodra have been able to change the old perception of voluntarism in the city thus introducing a new definition for community responsibility and mobilization. A new suitable environment is being created in the city matching with new values

³⁵ The Survey "Recognition and Evaluation of the Community Liaison Structure from Citizens" was carried out by IDM Staff, in June 2006, in two groups of cities: the one already holding the position of Community Liaisons, respectively: Tirana, Fier, Shkodra and two cities which do not have that structure incorporated yet in their local institutions respectively: Lushnja and Elbasan.

³⁶ The Focus Group Discussions, which were carried out by IDM staff, in August 2008, were a series of working-round table meetings with Community Liaisons, and Mayors of 6 Municipal Units in Tirana, namely of Municipal Units Nr: 1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11. Present in the Group Discussions were in total 100 participants.

of common responsibility and joint civic action which as such are the basis for the development and consolidation of the local democracy.

The structure of *Community Based Groups* very often has become direct promoter of various decisions of local government. Consolidation of this structure has become an inalienable prerequisite and is at the same time proving that its permanence remains a local responsibility but also a precondition for governance developments. The successful impact of these projects has already laid down the basis for further action by IDM in a genuine struggle to increase public support and strengthen partnerships with local government representatives for a major policy development in this context, both in Albania and in the region.

Certainly due to the very similar socio-economic background that Albania has with other countries in the region in terms of past legitimacy, current issues and future challenges, these good practices of participatory governance and community mobilization may well serve in neighboring countries as well, of course if adopted within the respective contexts and cultural settings of the communities concerned.

Furthermore, community participation and mobilization schemes as well as tools that address the gap between the community and local government are particularly effective in multiethnic and multi-cultural societies, as it is the case of Kosovo and Macedonia. As these countries are characterized by a large diversity of population, consisting of various ethnic and linguistic minority groups, IDM considers the model of Community Liaison and the various schemes of community mobilization through specific interest groups as extremely relevant to the above-mentioned context.

IDM considers the above-described tools as the most effective to achieve local policy transforming into inclusive and participatory. The work done in local neighborhoods as described above has resulted into sustainable community based groups that are effect beyond lifetime of the projects and that have advocated and lobbied to local government institutions for community interest policies and community support action. The communications and impact tools that CBG have made use to influence policy making have resulted in municipal council approving support fund for community oriented actions. Further to this effort the municipal authorities are working with IDM, community groups and business community to found the Local Trust Fund, and inclusive locally based institutions to manage and support activities of local actions citizens' groups. The Municipality has agreed to allocate an annual budget to Local Trust Fund. This is a first experience ever taking place in Albania

IX. *Policy Alternatives and Recommendations*

There is no doubt that citizen participation in policymaking brings about numerous benefits not only for the communities as direct beneficiaries of the process, but also for government, business sector and other stakeholders with vested interest in improved government-citizen relations. Therefore, it is of great importance to discuss the two main *policy options* based on an analysis of the key elements of this paper as well as best practices researched and case study elaborated. For the sake of the argument, it is best to explain the *policy option* of *supporting participatory governance* as directly benefiting effective policy-making, better government-citizen relations and enhanced transparency based on the respective roles of actors responsible not only for supporting, but also institutionalizing participatory governance. In this context:

- *Public administration* (local and central governments) need to be cognizant of their need to make themselves visible by seriously and consistently soliciting public input either directly or through institutions and mechanisms designed for such purposes. Effective communication between government and citizens translates into more transparent, accountable and legitimate policy-making;
- *Not-for-profit organizations* need to ensure that not only do they represent the collective voice of communities, but they do so in a way which public concerns are fed systematically into the policy debate and formulation process. This requires not only constant interaction and dialogue with the public but also constant efforts to update their own internal capacities and knowledge on the policy process;
- *Citizens* themselves need to be aware that they are the most powerful actor in instigating and enacting policy reform by participating actively in any form of community mobilization initiative and holding government responsible not only for the quality of mandated services, but also for improved policies;
- *Civil society* as a whole (including community-based organizations, professional associations, labor unions, etc) need to understand both their informal role in the policy process but also the limitations of such role in formalizing and enacting public policy, the responsibility for which rests with government agencies, legal frameworks and availability of resources;
- *Business organizations* also have a powerful role to play as regards civil society – government relations in the policy making process. Through their active participation in tri-partite partnerships, they both help and empower communities as ‘policy entrepreneurs’. Their presence in policy process also benefits their own corporate interests as well as their philanthropy and social accountability efforts.

It is important to also reflect upon the *opposite option* – that of complacency with status quo. At the very least, postponing measures to strengthen citizen-government relations seems unlikely to halt the steady erosion in citizens’ trust in government. At worst, it may contribute to exacerbating social divisions and disaffection with democracy as a form of government... . While much has been achieved, much remains to be done³⁷.

³⁷ Caddy, J. & Vergez, C, 2007

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