

The background of the entire page is a solid brown color. Overlaid on this background is a complex, abstract geometric pattern. This pattern consists of numerous thin, light-colored lines that connect small, solid-colored dots. The dots are arranged in a way that creates a series of interconnected, irregular polygons of various shapes and sizes, resembling a network or a molecular structure. The overall effect is one of a dense, interconnected web of points and lines.

**“SOCIETY AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE:
PERSPECTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT”
PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY SEMINAR**

UDC 314/316:342.553

“Society and Local Self-Governance: Perspectives for Development”
Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations from The Organizational
Activity Seminar

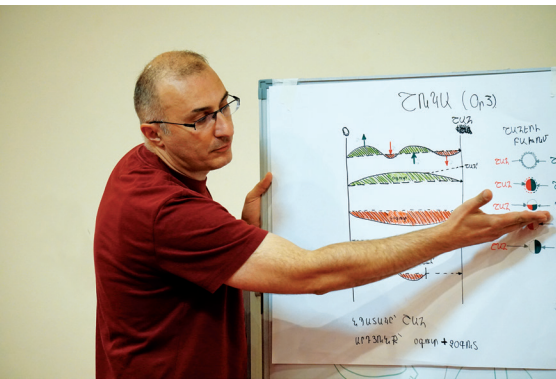
ISBN 978-9939-896-08-3

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INTRODUCTION

Within the scope of the Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) project, from September 8-12, 2017 in Aghveran, Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) convened an **organizational activity seminar**¹ (OAS), the objective of which was to involve representatives of all the stakeholder groups and comprehensively discuss the process of local self-governance reform, issues related to decentralization, and to develop an effective strategy and tools for public participation.

This was the second organizational activity seminar organized within the scope of the CELoG project. The previous seminar was organized during the first year of the project's implementation and was directed at the development of strategic recommendations for public participation in local self-governance. The third seminar is also planned at the end of the five-year program. These events allow one to understand, on the one hand, the stakeholders' attitude regarding issues of local self-governance and, on the other hand, to see how the CELoG program is developing overall and what changes and additions need to be made to the program. In order to analyze this practical summary from the second seminar in more detail, it can be compared to the **summary**² of the first seminar.



The seminar was organized within the context of important LSG reforms; consolidation had already occurred in several communities, and the lessons and issues raised by this process have also been voiced among the recommendations. The additional need for decentralization was also emphasized in parallel to the consolidation process. All the results of the seminar were directed at providing more meaning to the idea of “decentralization” within the conditions of consolidation.

The event participants included representatives of LSGs, community NGOs, the authorities, donor and international organizations, the media as well as experts in local self-governance and related sectors.

The preliminary conclusions and recommendations extracted by EPF from the

¹ Organizational Activity Seminar: <http://www.epfarmenia.am/creative-game-msta/>


² http://am.epfarmenia.am/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CELoG-CG-Major-Highlights_Eng.pdf

OAS report are presented below. In this brief report we included the ideas that can be particularly important and applicable for the CELoG program.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. The fragmentation of the value system in Armenia leads to a process of continuous searching, the purpose of which is to help the individual, structure, group of people, or other unit to find their identity, including their place, role and connections given the context of the disunited and fragmented rules of the situation in Armenia. Because it is almost impossible to insert any clarity in this situation in the given conditions, this search either turns into an endless process, or it repels the subject from the system and/or defeats the subject's will, as a result of which it does not have any significant impact on the development of a united set of rules.
2. The fragmentation of the value system leads to communication breakdowns, as a result of which the central authorities, LSGs and the population are unable to communicate with each other effectively. This leads to mutual discontent, because information exchanges occur ineffectively.
3. In the horizontal plane, a lack of communication and joint decision making lead to a further hierarchization of the system, and a narrowing of the scope of decisions that can be taken independently at the community level. In turn, this slows down and distorts the process of developing a community identity.
4. The tendencies to find new solutions in the governance system are highly limited because the governance process is directed at preserving what exists, or adjusting it. As a result, at the local level, the establishment of independent decisions, and the tendency to generate such decisions is also limited.
5. There is a necessity for institutional systems and al-





gorithms to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of actions that are taken at all levels. This need stems from not only the lack of confidence in governance bodies on the part of the recipients of services, but also from the necessity to have an objective picture and the need to clearly see where one belongs and what one should do in the country, society and community.

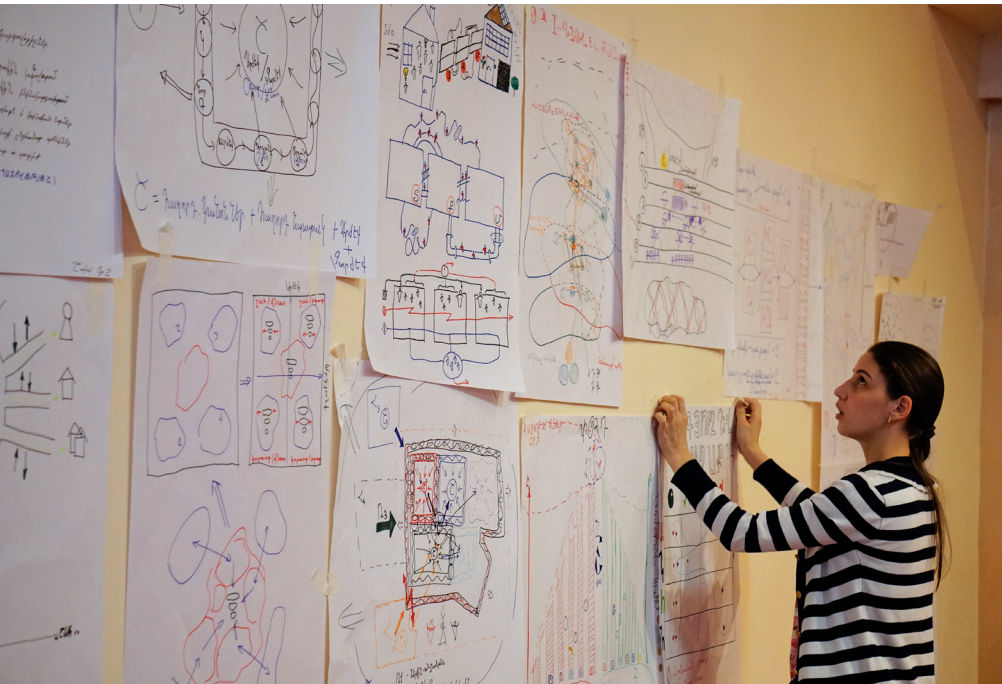
6. The presumed scarcity of the necessary resources available for community development has been disputed at the seminar: the issue of the scarcity/lack of resources was referred to from a different viewpoint, which consists of three main approaches:

- The resources exist but they are not used effectively and in a result-oriented fashion,
- The resources can be found, but the necessary environment must exist for that to happen,
- In order to use various kinds of resources in a more effective manner, favorable conditions must be created for their pooling.

“Resource” here refers to all kinds of resources, first and foremost, the creative ability of community residents to solve problems and to see possibilities. For that to happen, the residents of a community must be empowered, they must feel that they are the “owners” of the community and they should relate to other community residents as owners or “shareholders”. The community members must also be educated in order to see the options for solutions to the problems, thus adding to the available resources.

7. The term “participation” has lost its value, which has happened for two main reasons. First, the real result of participation does not match its expected results. Second, a distortion has occurred of the term “participation”, i.e. it does not involve the engagement of citizens in governance processes in a way that is sufficient for the

people to consider themselves to be stakeholders in the process. Essentially what participation means today in practice is a situation where the government or LG set agendas and ask or demand citizens to support them, with only very limited chance for the latter to modify the predefined decisions. It is for this reason that one of the groups proposed the term **“whole-icipation”** instead of “participation”. This term is, in essence, a demand to provide new meaning and value to participatory processes, turning decision-making into citizen-centered processes, and not transforming participation into “favors” being provided to the citizens by the authorities.



8. The three main issues for effective inter-community collaboration are **trust, identification of mutual interest and a lack of resources**. It is clear that these issues are closely related to each other. If the overall interest is understood, the necessity for communication to discuss collaborative action will appear. As a result of this, the communities will have a motivation to build trust towards each other. In turn, this will create the need for a resource assessment and investment, with the aim of solving the shared problem. In the case of effective implementation of such communication, the communities will first be able to develop the main principles for collaboration, after which it will be possible to create the necessary systems to coordinate them.



The same issue, i.e. an indicator of the extensive lack of trust, is typical also of other public spheres and even cases of interpersonal social collaboration. The ability of people to come to an agreement with each other for the greater good, without leadership “from above”, in the case when the greater good is larger than the benefits to each of the individuals separately, is an indicator of a healthy society, and the guarantee of the presence of a community in the broad sense. This is a topic of wide research in academic circles, and some studies have shown that lack of trust, so understood, is particularly present in post-Soviet societies. Researchers sometimes link this to the influence of Soviet society; people’s connections to each other in a totalitarian society would be cut off or weakened, because each individual would be connected directly with the commands coming from the “above”, the one at the “top”. Thus, there was a “society” but there was not really a “community”. Johan Galtung called this process “atomie, anomie and anemie” saying that, as a consequence of this “atomization” there was the inability to develop “names” and “rules”, norms and agreements, which resulted in a lack of action. This happens when the price of collaboration seems greater than the use of one’s personal resources to tackle the issue for oneself, and the benefits expected from collaboration seem less realistic, more distant and smaller, than the resource that would be saved if there were no attempt at collaboration. In everyday language, we refer to this as the psychology of a “sure thing” (“naghđ” in conversational Armenian), while researchers refer to it as a lack of trust in the future and the tactics to avoid planning for the unknown. This is one of the most important factors that acts as an obstacle to individuals, as well as communities,


preventing them from developing and expressing their creative abilities, and it must be opposed by everyone who sincerely wishes to change the situation.

9. When the differences among the various structures and infrastructures involved in the LSG sector, the supra-community units, LSGs, communities, community structures are viewed in the context of conflicts of interest, it becomes possible to understand and imagine the possible issues and opportunities that can arise, for example, between the community and supra-community units. If the resources of the community are assessed adequately, the community can act not as someone resisting the “plunder” of a resource belonging to it, but rather as a unit that initiates extra-community communication, and/or it can put its own intra-community resource to work, in order to prevent any designs on them by a supra-community unit. The initiation of a mutually beneficial collaboration between communities based on this community resource will, on the one hand, consolidate the community’s identity while, on the other hand, thanks to the efforts centered around the community resource, the community will develop as an owner and manager of the resource, making it much more difficult for external actors to “plunder” a community resource without taking the community’s needs into consideration.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS (SELECTED)

1. Make **inter-community collaboration** a mandatory part of five-year LSG programs, being reflected in the strategy for the community and plans for collaboration of a community with the neighboring ones. This can be developed as a project/program that will include a description of the expected objectives of the collaboration, the issues and actions.
2. The new **“whole-icipation” methodology** for





community development assumes the planning of community development perspectives in two main ways:

- “First” by sector
- “Then” by infrastructures

The planning of separate sectors is first conducted in the form of discussions. Each sector is discussed separately—the environmental unit, educational, cultural, or, in more detail, extracurricular education, waste management, road construction and other issues—involving as broad a range of the relevant structures, experts and residents as possible. Visions are brought forward.

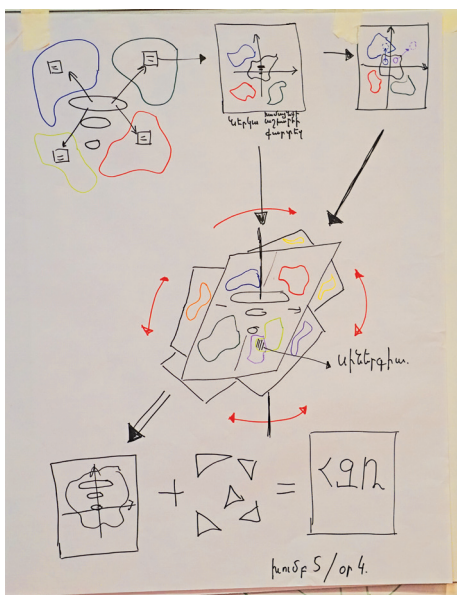
The “next” stage of planning, by infrastructures, consists of strategic discussions organized by community institutions, which involve both the representatives of the actual structures as well as the main beneficiaries. For example, the planning of the kindergarten is organized with the participation of the kindergarten, the relevant department of the village municipality office, with bearers of expert knowledge in the community, and parents. The planning of other infrastructures is conducted in the same way. During the discussions, each infrastructure leaders try to formulate their own vision as an autonomous body as well as the actions that will take them towards that vision, the necessary resources, their possible results and so on. It is important for participants to already have an understanding of sectoral development during the discussions developing the vision and strategy of the infrastructure, so that they can plan the development of their infrastructure by placing it in line with strategies related to the sector.

This proposal is, in essence, a long-term communication mechanism that, on the one hand, is meant to fill the information gaps between decision makers and the population, thus removing differences to the extent possible, and, on the other hand, it is meant to form and develop as detailed a common vision as possible as well as sepa-

rate visions. The ongoing result of the process will be to evaluate the non-financial resources of the community and the engagement of the population as the direct participant of community development programs.

We have put the “first” and “then” in quotes, because the initiation of these processes will happen in parallel from time to time. After all, life in the community will not come to a standstill until the inter-sectoral discussions can take place, and there will be the need for discussions on infrastructures on many occasions. However, methodologically, the correct approach is to go from broader and larger visions to more concrete steps, and even if the concrete part falls ahead, decision makers will be driven by the clarity or lack thereof in the broad and large issues. For example, if the sectoral policy has not yet been developed, the infrastructure issues can receive more “flexible” solutions, so that they do not end up in conflict with the broader strategies when the sectoral clarifications are in place.

This methodological application to planning allows one also to discover long-term opportunities for partnership with other communities. For example, if the music school of the community has a vision that includes providing services to surrounding communities, then the planning of future activities by the school would include transportation options for children from neighboring communities, and agreements with the LSGs of these communities for the provision of the necessary resources for these services. This would give the opportunity for the effective planning of inter-community partnership.



3. The OAS recommends to study examples of successful “sustainable” communities³ in Armenia, to extract the main reasons for success and to analyze the applicability of the identified models for other communities. The results of the

³ By a “sustainable” community we mean a community in which the LSG is able to adequately provide the services required by the population, and to implement development programs using its own resources.

study will be applicable for all communities that have commonalities with the models or the studied communities. For example, communities with a similar demographic, natural and/or infrastructure conditions can benefit from learning each other's ways of work. When examining the results of the study, the community can learn lessons from the studied case and contact the 'case study' community to gain a better understanding of its experience.

4. **Diversification:** there is a need for discussions of opportunities for diversification in sectors, directions and processes for the communities with a long-term dependence on one rigid solution or resource. This process must include not just the LSG representatives, but also the local NGOs, active citizens, community members with sector-related expertise, as well as the accessible expert resource located outside the community.

Even if this process does not lead to the diversification of the sector or process being discussed, it will at least change the stereotypical thinking of the community towards its long-term perspectives, exposing this long-term dependence by the community on one source or resource.


5. **“Visionometer”:** The community will first undergo an in-depth study of programs that emerge from the contracts signed by the state with regional structures, business units, and international organizations, as well as those obligations related to membership in international structures (such as the EEU, EU and so on), followed by a triangulation of these data with the community issues. Which functions and obligations of the Armenian state are relevant when it comes to the community needs? The matching data will be identified, as will be common points. The opportunities for collaboration or participation will be extracted. This step will also identify potential clashes, which would allow the community to understand in advance how to avoid the conflict or gain from it. This is particularly relevant for communities that have resources that are of interest outside the community, like mines, water resources, historic and cultural monuments and so on. For example, a mining company supported by the state is planning to exploit a mine on the territory belonging to the community, while the international environmental community has placed its faith in the development of renewable energy or a green economy. Armenia has taken on certain obligations as part of its commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including to tackle problems in environmental management and alternative energy. The community can use the conflict between these two developments as part of its strategy to develop its economy.

6. The “visionometer” proposal can find another application in the context of in-

ter-community collaboration. This process, in contrast to the previous one, does not combine various strategies to develop the vision of one community, but does this rather for the combination of the various visions of different communities into a general strategy. This process also has a serious communication component, because communication between communities should serve to identify the commonalities and differences, the mutual interests, and the development of an inter-community strategy. This approach opposes, to a certain extent, the current approach to inter-community collaboration, in which the partnership occurs sometimes only around a single function, for example with the objective to create an intercommunity waste management unit. According to the proposed approach, the collaboration will be developed based on the strategic directions identified by the combination of visions, and it will then be specified into a functional or multi-functional set of projects. That is, the strategic description of the inter-community collaboration must be shaped by a memorandum signed by the communities, or a framework agreement that will then lead to specific projects to organize the partnership in various sectors.

7. **“Legal acts archive”.** The “legal acts archive” is a collection and analysis of all the normative documents produced on a local basis, as well as all the governance mechanisms that emerge from them and the development of an inception plan for actions in cases when the normative act is there, but has not been applied. A “normative document” in this case includes the orders, decisions and procedures developed by the LSG with the direct participation of the community, which delineate the local approaches to the rules associated with the local solution of a problem, for example, how social support will be provided, based on the community’s resources, opportunities, the current consensus in the community on the issue and so on. In a practical sense, this component is not just the development of the analysis and classification of the LSG decisions, but is also part of the





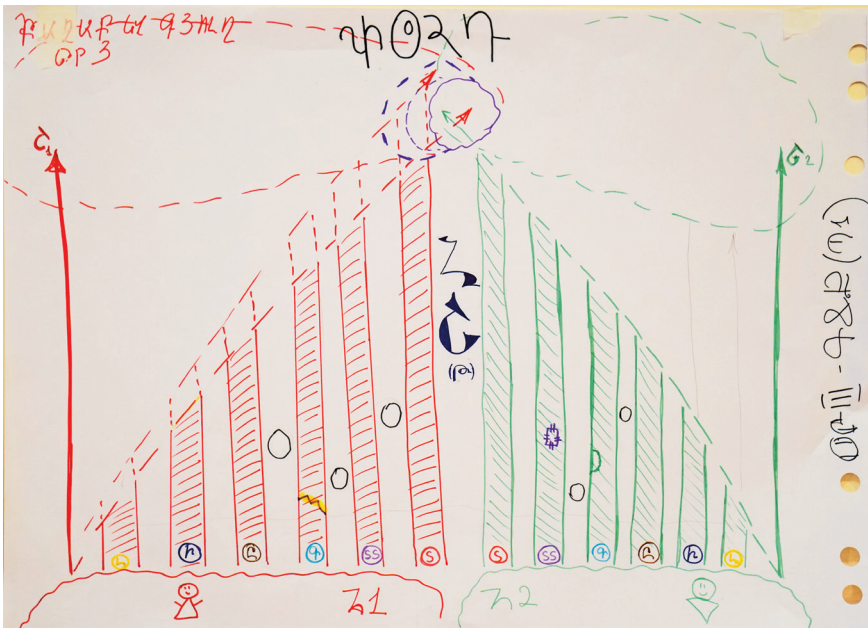
process of developing community members' capacities to make decisions for themselves and for the community. During the course of this classification, the “real” decisions generated by the community are identified along with their typology, while the normative acts that have come from the supra-community layer are also analyzed from the point of view of whether they are “real” or “pseudo”. This will essentially serve as the foundation for developing a methodology, which will be related to the typology of decisions.

The methodology of differentiating “real” decisions from “pseudo” ones is based on a range of factors and is not limited to whether or not the population of the community “likes” the decision. This is a basis for differentiation and an indicator of the level of sophistication of the community members as well as their LSG. In order to understand this classification in more detail, contact the EPF team, which has developed some methodologies in the area of teaching critical thinking.

8. **“Self-Governance House”**. The “Self-Governance House” is essentially the reformed LSG, where the basis for reform has consisted, first of all, of the processes taking place in the **legal acts archive**, and the results associated with it. When this component is combined with the collaboration projects developed with neighboring communities and the purpose of supra-community unit programs is made to serve the community population, it becomes possible to secure a logical connection between the normative acts produced at the community level and the activities directed at its development, because it will create the possibility to inter-relate the community development strategy with the norms accepted and/or adapted by the community, based on its real needs.

This process can be depicted in the following way. If a comparison is conducted with the resources and efforts of a neighboring community with the objective of this exercise being to improve community services, this is

reflected in a corresponding normative act – an order, agreement, or decision. If this is taking place for the first time, then it becomes an example that can then also lead to a general principle of inter-community collaboration that will be more broadly practiced. Similarly, if the focus is on the green economy, which is a priority, the community can set this as part of its development program and then establish the green economy as part of its parameters, after which it works to make this a “real” and not a “pseudo” decision, which will require very clear actions in broad areas of decision making, for example, creating job opportunities not only in the mining sector.



9. **Triple coordination model.** This model can be understood as a proposed approach for the ongoing coordination of community governance. The model proposes three layers – “automatic”, “editorial” and “creative”. These are the filters for coordination through which the community residents or LSG representatives can evaluate the effectiveness of procedures, programs and infrastructure.

A process at the level of its application in the community is considered to be at the “automatic-editorial-creative” levels and, based on the level at which the issue has been identified, the corresponding adjustments can be made. Let us assume that the principle is correct but it was wrongly defined at the level of the normative document, then this document can be edited; if everything

is functioning normally at the level of the normative document, then the applicability level is examined; if the issue is systemic, then the principle is reviewed.

This model is similar to the **Cynefin** framework⁴, which was initially proposed by the IBM corporation. In our OAS this idea evolved independently. Perhaps the OAS model can be enriched by the forth level, the “chaotic” domain (a term from the Cynefin approach): this fourth part of the model is the situation in which it is unknown how one should make a decision.

Through the three layers noted it is possible to also evaluate the LSG system. This model allows one to understand, first of all, the extent to which this or that direction of the self-governance system is accurate and relevant to the needs of the community. This occurs at the creative level, i.e. the principle or the strategic approach is evaluated. After this, there is an assessment of the extent to which it is correctly formulated at a normative level, which takes place at the second—the editorial—level, and is reflected, to a certain extent, in the processes that form a part of the “legal acts archive” project. If the normative document needs to be edited, it is edited. The third level considers the extent to which the existing technologies and procedural systems are suitable (adapted) for the implementation of the normative acts, norms and the principles that they embody. This occurs at the “automatic” level, where the practical-procedural processes are assessed.

AFTERWORD

The ideas expressed in this document constitute only a part of the whole that was covered and developed by the seminar. The objective of this document is to express in a non-seminar language, understandable to a general audience, the ideas that were considered by the compilers of this text to be the most applicable, important and implementable. The remaining ideas and the material related to the seminar can be seen in the seminar ‘long’ report and the schemas developed as a result of it.

This document has several objectives. First, it will be used within the CELoG program, and some ideas will be implemented, albeit at a pilot level. Second, it will be provided to decision makers at all levels. Third, it will also be provided to a broad range of project stakeholders, including regular community members, because the ideas presented here can, as we have seen, both be implemented “from above” as well as “from below” or with collaborative participation (which lies at the very heart of the ideology of the CELoG program). They are interrelated

⁴ https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynefin_framework

and, together, if they are implemented, they will allow the development of communities to achieve a new level, solving, to a certain extent, issues related to resources, and making community governance much more “participatory”.

A pre-condition for the success of this approach is the “education” of the community members. Education should be organized for community members as well as for LSGs, allowing them to get more familiar with that broad scope of international opportunities and obligations within which Armenia currently exists (international obligations, opportunities and so on, including the UN SDGs, the EU-Armenia agreement, EEU and so on), as an issue of the highest priority. The second issue, which had been reflected in the summary of the first seminar as well, is building those capacities of LSG representatives, NGOs and active citizens that are usually referred to as facilitation skills, for them to be able to develop strategies, which will lead to the empowerment of the whole community, allowing the implementation of the recommendations provided in this document via expressions of local initiative.

There is also a possibility of working with other USAID programs (DePo, MICE and others) as well as EU and other donor-funded programs, in order to develop these skills among community members and LSGs.

It is worth noting that these ideas, usually coming from a high level of specialized knowledge in governance and management, were produced locally through an active and participatory process, thus creating a bridge between LSG staff members, including their leadership, and regular beneficiaries, which made all participants the owners of these ideas, to a certain extent, and the strategic who for the implementation of these ideas.



