

# **UACES 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference**

**Passau, 3-5 September 2012**

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## Working Paper

Not for quotation

'The Role of Partnership Strategies in Delivering European SF to Roma-Inclusion Initiatives in Spain and Slovakia'

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### Introduction

*Partnership* and greater interagency cooperation between governmental tiers, public agencies and the third sector has become a prerequisite for accessing and administrating Structural Funds (SF), the main financial tool of European cohesion policy. In 1988 partnership principle was incorporated into the cohesion regulations and has since informed successive waves of reforms, aimed at involving an increasingly wide range of stakeholders in the SF programming cycle. Policy-makers were asked to adopt novel forms of power sharing and 'open up' their institutions to participatory styles of policy-making. Although, the rush to get aboard *partnership* bang wagon may have been jumpstarted by the European Union (EU) regulations, it has also reflected a major legitimacy crisis of the public sector as a provider of welfare services. Traditional forms of top-down government have been challenge by the growing complexity and fragmentation of social and political life and the need to mobilize and use the knowledge, skills, and resources of diverse subnational actors.

In the case of theme-based strategies design to tackle socio-economic exclusion of Roma citizens<sup>1</sup>, partnership became portrayed as a necessary governance tool to improve the documented underperformance of SF in this policy area (European Commission 2008; 2010). This largely reflects an accepted notion that multidimensional problems require multi-agency approaches (ERRC 2010; RTF

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<sup>1</sup> Today with an estimated population of around 12 million people, Roma constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe, present in all 27 EU Member States (WB 2005). Despite their heterogeneous background and the range of countries and environments in which they live Roma continue to be the

2010). Scholars and practitioners pointed to the fact that the individual barriers (e.g. lack of skills) and socio-economic context (e.g. living in an area of multiple deprivation) faced by impoverished Roma communities are often interrelated, overlapping and mutually reinforcing. Hence allocating funds to one factor of the support system are unlikely to be fully successful owing to the counteracting impacts of other factors. Multi-agency cooperation is also portrayed as a process that can successfully activate Roma communities traditionally excluded from conventional channels of political influence. It is assumed that the presence of deprived groups at the decision-making table not only endows SF interventions with valuable knowledge about what is needed on the ground (arguable making them more effective) but also fosters greater equality and justice within the society.

Normative arguments about partnership and its role in promoting a more legitimate administration of SF, responsive to the needs and expectations of Roma communities are in a dire need of empirical investigation. Given that there is no ideal model of partnership it is important to disclose which arrangements are better suited for procuring an effective and equitable administration of SF in the area of Roma-inclusion. The paper analyses partnership along two dimensions: the scope of participation and the mode of interactions. It highlights the tensions between the width of partnership (how many stakeholders are invited to participate) and its depth (a degree of influence participants can exercise). It brings together empirical evidence from two contrasting cases Spain and Slovakia in an effort to capture the causal relationship between partnership's design and successful policy output<sup>2</sup>. The main finding of this study is rather counterintuitive; it shows that a more pluralist approach to partnership is not necessarily conducive to a more legitimate or equitable delivery of SF to projects benefiting the Roma.

### **Context of partnership**

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<sup>2</sup> The empirical material used in this paper consist of 30 semi-structured interviews with major SF stakeholders including public officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Spain and Slovakia and an in-depth analysis of official documents including NAPs, OPs, regulatory frameworks and minutes of meetings. The focus is on the design of ESF Operational Programs in the two funding periods 2000-2004 and 2007-2013.

The EU has promoted partnership principle as a main tool for improving and legitimizing all aspects of SF governance- planning, design, implementation and evaluation of project outputs.<sup>3</sup> Although all member states have transposed partnership principle into their National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRF) the scope of its implementation continue to vary significantly across the European Community. A series of published studies demonstrate that these differences stem from priori experience with partnership, as well as from the nature of pre-existing power relations between central and local government levels as well as the third sector (Hooghe 1996; Marek and Baun 2009). Nevertheless, a novel thematic conceptualization of regional disparities in terms of social-exclusion (rather than strictly based on income re-distribution<sup>4</sup>) facilitated the spread of multi-agency approaches and rationalized greater involvement of the sub-national tiers, civil society groups and private interests. Input from local actors with concrete experiences of exclusion was supposed to inform public administrations about community needs, while cooperation with service deliverers and civil society organizations contribute to creation of innovative and cost-efficient interventions. For Roma minorities, partnership appeared as an unprecedented opportunity to end political marginalization and gain influence over public interventions that target their communities. It became common to assume that presence of Roma representatives in different stages of SF programing would automatically enhance targeting of SF and the quality of funded projects<sup>5</sup>. Less scrutiny was given to the degree of influence these new participants could secure and their ability to challenge existing regional development strategies (the Operational Programs).

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<sup>3</sup> Partnership principle has undergone numerous reforms all aimed at expanding the scope of participants. In the 1999 reform then added horizontal dimension to already functioning vertical partnership. It expanded the range of partner organizations to 'other competent bodies' primarily equal opportunities and environmental groups (Article 8, Council Regulation 1260/1999). The last version of the relevant regulations was presented in 2006 and explicitly recognised the role of civil society organizations in partnership arrangements (Article 9, Council Regulation 183/2006). Just looking at these reforms, the commitment to partnership becomes very clear even in the light of 'scattered implementation'.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of social exclusion is now firmly entrenched in Spanish and Slovak policy.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews conducted during the High Level Event on Structural Funds contribution to Roma integration in Slovakia (Bratislava, May 2011)

Vague definitions of partnership provided by the EU regulations and little agreement on what constitutes a good model of participation, have not stopped theorists, practitioners and activists from marveling at benefits of more collaborative policy-making. The normative dimension of partnership was accurately captured by the words of Bauer (2002: 773–4): ‘One should not underestimate how using a notion like *partnership*, which resonates with *doing things together* and communicates the image of consensual action, commands great appeal in our societies and thus makes it relatively hard for critics to oppose it’. However, the positive connotation of partnership did not translate into a common vision of its structure and purpose. The gravest concern referred to question whether inclusiveness and ‘a normative preference for devolved decision making’ come at the cost of decreased effectiveness (Scott, 1999) as well as the perceived trade-off between the increased complexity, implied by the multi-actor and multi-level nature of the process, and the transparency and accountability of the same (Bache 2008). Much of this disagreement has to do with the normative yardstick applied in the evaluation of interactive policy making, in particular different notions of democracy as direct or representative that entitles different understanding of legitimization and empowerment.

### ***Direct Democracy ‘an unachievable ideal’***

Advocates of direct democracy argue that the new forms of interactive governance hold a contingent promise for a further democratization of a society that responds to the so-called ‘democratic disenchantment’- evidenced by the decline in voter turn-out and party membership and the mounting distrust in elected politicians – by ensuring that those affected by public policies have a direct influence on these policies through engagement with relevant public authorities (Warren 2009). They advertise participation as an antidote for structural injustice whereby some groups cannot influence political agendas, decision-making, or gain information relevant to assessing how well policy alternatives serve their interests because ‘they are excluded, unorganized, or too weak’ (Fung 2006). Their position on partnership takes a form of direct involvement of citizens and argues for replacement of authorized decision-makers whose actions have become

systematically unjust with direct citizen participation (Melo and Baiocchi 2006). In this conceptualization democratic legitimacy derives from the width of participation (how many stakeholders are allowed to participate). The major shortcoming of this viewpoint is that it does not take under consideration the possibility that there may be contexts in which full *citizen control* is not appropriate or even desirable by the general public. It also fails to propose effective institutional modes, which would be able to accommodate the voice of citizens inside SF programming. Although, Roma-inclusion stakeholders enthusiastically promote direct involvement of Roma in SF programming, epitomized in slogan ‘nothing about us without us’<sup>6</sup> their calls continue to dwell in the realm of theoretical aspirations and provides little concrete opportunities to influence outputs and outcomes of public policies.

A more moderate position, argues for strengthening of civil society considered to be the main defender of needs and interests sidelined from political agendas (Zimmer and Stecker 2004; Evers and Laville 2004). In this paradigm civil society is portrayed as a guardian of basic democratic principles, including transparency, equality and justice that for one reason or another have been jeopardized by economic priorities and efficiency measures embedded in SF programming. Thus it is supposed to make sure that SF programming and corresponding action plans address the needs of the most marginalized or deprived regions and sectors of the society. However, the alleged *representativeness* of civil society and its independence from political power structures are difficult to confirm when juxtapose with empirical evidence (Salgado 2005). Recent research has indicated that as a result of civil society’s involvement in SF projects, and the contracting out and performance measurement that followed it, the traditional boundaries between state and civil society have been breaking down to the point where a class of indeterminate organizational hybrids has emerged (Evers 2005; Brandsen et al. 2005). Somewhat ironically closer involvement in project delivery has exposed civil society to political patronage and donor dependency that severely undermined its accountability and legitimacy. This is especially visible in the

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<sup>6</sup> First presented by the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 and subsequently entrenched inside the European discourse and 10 Basic Common Principles on Roma Inclusion.

representation of Roma interests, where small grassroots organizations are expected to navigate through overly complex procedures and comply with rigorous SF conditionalities. These administrative burdens often consume the majority of allocated funds leaving insufficient resources for project implementation. Civil society workers claim that this not only ‘jeopardizes projects’ quality and sustainability, but also muddles organizational priorities, generates frustration and misunderstanding’<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Representative Democracy ‘the majority rule’***

On the other end of the continuum proponents of representative democracy continue to put faith in electoral legitimacy (Scott 1999). Here the main paradigm presents competition as a legitimate source of representation. Thus democracy is secured by institutional arrangements that provide a space where individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote (Schumpeter 1943). This transforms public arena into a *marketplace* where voters act rationally and choose a political leader and a programme, while political parties and leaders try to maximize votes (Downs 1956). Legitimacy in this model is connected to the procedure that is followed (the voting) and the fact that political office holders are accountable and can be dismissed at the next election (Klijn 2011; 207). Advocates of representative models argue that adding new actors and expanding channels of participation hollows out authority of democratic institutions and results in the so-called ‘democratic deficit’ (Scott 1999). They believe that for SF programming to be more effective it should be tied to the mandates of the ruling parties or governing coalitions. As such the state and the third sectors should be carefully separated, and the latter should not encroach on the former since that undermines the democratic sovereignty of the elected politicians and the government (Torfing and Triantafillou 2011). What is taken for granted here is that electoral competition tends to favor majority interests and anchors outcomes of public decisions to *median voter’s* preferences. Given that Roma do not constitute a majority in any state or sub-national jurisdiction, their veto power is severely

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with manager of the non-governmental organization operating in Seville (June 2011)

limited and compounded by limited political representation within political parties. In a country like Slovakia efforts to popularize parties base on ethnic membership or build coalitions with mainstream representation have failed.<sup>8</sup> Thus it becomes apparent that without institutionalization of more flexible means and ways of participation in policy-making Roma interests are likely to dwell outside mainstream agenda.

### ***Complex modes of partnership***

Given the limitations of the above models in capturing changing nature of policy processes and prescribing feasible modes of more inclusive participation, new conceptualizations have emerged mostly inside the scholarship on governance. Governance tends to be a slippery concept, often used with quite different meanings and implications. However, unlike the narrow term *government* it has capacity to cover the whole range of institutions and relations involved in the process of governing (Pierre and Peters, 2000). Under the umbrella of governance partnership has been conceptualized as multileveled, composed of vertical and horizontal interactions. In terms of the former, multilevel partnership can be defined as *negotiated exchanges* between different tiers of government, including transnational, national, regional and local (Peters and Pierre 2001). The later brings to attention how the relationships between different tiers of government can be influenced by a range of networks and co-productive arrangements composed of various interests including those from private sector and civil society. Here the legitimacy is diffuse and spread among different actors (even if formal elected bodies are present) who are encouraged to engage in organizational reciprocity in order to capture knowledge, resources and energies of miscellaneous actors involved with SF programming (McQuaid 2011; Pemberton; Marsh and Smith 2001).

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<sup>8</sup> There are numerous reasons for this spectacular failure, for comprehensive discussion of those reasons see Sobotka Eva (2003) "Political Representation of the Roma: Roma in Politics in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland" available on-line <http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/0000187/01/sobotka.pdf>



Although the multilevel partnership provides a voice to a growing number of people it remains unclear whether it actually activates the most marginalized sectors of the society. It appears that Member States are keener to use partnership as a tool for efficient administration of SF than as a catalyst for the empowerment of citizens. One interviewee nicely summarized the situation ‘...we opted for working with competent and trusted partners who exhibit high managerial skills and procedural knowledge, we cannot afford to take risks and work with partners who might default on their contractual agreements.... partnership suppose to make things easier for us not more difficult’<sup>9</sup>. Numerous interviewed Roma stakeholders affirmed that public authorities often select actors based on their professional credentials (i.e. language skills) with little regard for their connection to the Roma community’s or their on-the-ground experience: ‘the majority of public officials believe that the Roma make difficult partners for cooperation, because apparently they lack professionalism and organizational rigor, hence they cannot provide *rational* advice’<sup>10</sup>. This raises questions about legitimacy and accountability of Roma representatives participating in designing and implementing SF programming. Moreover, the focus on efficiency and professionalism in many ways allows shifting the blame for inadequate utilization of funds, onto an array of bureaucratic oversights and lack of know-how rather than apathetic political will, structural inequalities and power asymmetries (see Community of Practice 2012). It also legitimized manicure solutions over ambitious and costly reconstructions of the entire institutional settings. It appears that thus far partnership has been used more as a tool for jumpstarting processes of modernization of administration involved in SF management than a safeguard for equal representation and empowerment.

In this context partnership appears as a twofold tool. It can either allow citizen to exercise their ‘voice’ through deepening participation (empowering participants with decision making authority) or merely co-op more actors without actually improving the democratic qualities of the process (as the new actors may

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<sup>9</sup> Bratislava 2011

<sup>10</sup> Presov 2011

lack a formal mandate to challenge the powerful role of officials). It can also provide wider access (pluralist approach) or be confined to small number of highly qualified actors (corporatist approach). These conceptual issues were already investigated in a number of case studies on SF implementation in various national and regional settings. Many of them conclude that partnership is little more than a façade, allowing the government to control regional policy 'while borrowing local and regional know-how' (Bache and Olsson, 2001; Bailey and De Propris 2004; Dezseri 2007). Surprisingly little effort was made to investigate whether the consolidated approaches actually enhanced effectiveness of SF delivery (policy output). The shortcomings of partnership in facilitating democratization in many ways overshadowed its potential for generating effective outputs (which by in large are taken for granted). The next part of this work compares existing partnership arrangements in Spain and Slovakia along two conceptual dimensions: who participates and modes of participation. It demonstrates that co-productive partnerships utilized in Spain delivered more effective and legitimate outputs while pluralistic approaches adopted in Slovakia failed to do the same. The empirical evidence opens the door for a new discussion about the role of the government as a 'strategic leader' in partnership and questions the role of civil society in representing interest of excluded groups (in this context the Roma).

### **Looking at Spain and Slovakia**

In both countries ethnographical diversity of Roma population, combined with territorial dispersion of their communities, lack of resources, and high level of structural discrimination severally curtails the potential for grass-root mobilization, which could compel authorized officials to take greater interest in Roma issues and local quandaries. Moreover as Roma interests continue to be excluded from conventional channels of political influence, and have little capacity for collective action, they are often too weak to influence SF agendas and gain information relevant to assessing how well policy alternatives serve their interests. In this context the probability that their interests will be ill served by supranational and domestic policies is very high. Whether or not partnership in SF programing can remedy one of these problems depends in large measure upon who participates and

in what capacity. The analysis should aim to see whether participants are appropriately representative of the relevant population? And whether they possess skills, information and competences to make decisions and influence policies?

### **Who Participates?**

The selection of partners for managing SF programming can have a very inclusive character; all legally designated partners can participate; or can resemble 'selectively recruitment'; partners are chosen based on merit, thematic interests scope of activities etc. The inclusive approach is based on the assumption that those who are interested will strive to participate, usually through exerting some pressure on the authorities to be included. The selective recruitment on the other hand recognizes that some participants have better capacities for cooperation or possess more experience in certain areas, and thus would make suitable partners. Of course on many occasions selection processes are very exclusive catering only to elected politicians and expert administrators (however the partnership principle regulations and pressure to comply with international standards make exclusionary approaches very difficult to maintain and justify). In order to determine what type of partnership arrangements contributes to more successful policy outputs it is useful to look at how recruitment takes place and whether Roma representatives are invited.

### ***Spain***

Partnership in Spain has been characterized by inter-governmental interactions between the central and regional authorities. This fairly exclusive partnership began to open up at the end of the 1993-1999 funding period. The stimuli came with the Lisbon Treaty (2000) as the Spanish central government, under the co-ordination of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, began to prepare the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion for the period 2001-2003 and SF Operational Programs that were supposed to aid its implementation. The strategy displayed by the Plan Secretariat was to count on the participation and contribution provided by other institutions involved actively in the programmes of fight against poverty and exclusion; (a) public bodies (central, regional and local governments); (b) social partners (trade unions and Economic and Social Councils) and (c) NGOs

and experts. The amendment of partnership regulations that explicitly recognized civil society organizations in partnership arrangements (Article 9, Council Reg. 183/2006) provided legal grounds for inclusion of the third-sector and strengthened normative claims for their involvement in all aspects of SF programming. However, while the expansion of partnership was strongly endorsed at the national level, the regional authorities were less enthusiastic and reluctant to share, often newly gained power, with non-governmental actors. Hence the involvement of civil society has stayed more pronounced at the national level than among the regions (Autonomous Communities).

It would be difficult to argue that the partnership hype actively promoted by the government generated all-inclusive arrangements. In fact the central government adopted a highly selective recruitment method directed at choosing the most 'knowledgeable' and experienced partners. It quickly became clear that the government was more interested in innovative approaches that would effectively address problematic of social-exclusion than in democratization of SF programming and empowerment of excluded citizens. The authorities entered into negotiation with organizations that could demonstrate 'concrete outputs' and 'progress achieved in a specific thematic area'<sup>11</sup>. Special attention was given to organizations that provided services that created linkages between the excluded sectors of the society and public institutions (i.e. initiatives that provide information and encourage citizens to utilize existing public services). Moreover, the conducted interviews confirm that cooperation was mostly opened to partners with whom the authorities had previous institutional contact. This had less to do with political patronage and more with invested resources and type of services these NGOs delivered<sup>12</sup>. The government has equipped all the 'chosen' NGOs with material

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, General Directorate for Social Action, Minors and Family, Madrid 2011

<sup>12</sup> A number of scholars argued that large NGOs pushed out smaller NGOs as eligible partners, because of their political connections and patronage. Empirical research however has difficulties agreeing with such statements. In the case of Fundacion Secretariado Gitano and CERMI there was no significant co-operation with the state other than widely practice grants distribution and competitive tendering. Looking at the development of these two NGOs one however might notice that they were highly effective in utilizing these grants for building technical capacities and expanding scope of their action. They were also beneficiaries of European Community funding schemes.

infrastructure and human resources (through training; information exchange; and technical support). Accordingly, they were able to make not only comprehensive proposals, but could also articulate critical views, something that other rank-and-file associations could not afford.<sup>13</sup>

The capacity of the selected NGOs was largely built thorough programs financed by general taxation regarding projects of social action. They were funded with 0.5% of those income tax payments so explicitly targeted by taxpayers in their annual income tax statements (the other option is to transfer such moneys to the RC Catholic Church). In the year 1998, 89,9 million € were collected under this 0.5% entry, an amount which was one of the most important source of funding for these non-profit organizations. However the largest source of funding came from the central authorities in shape of grant, scholarships and technical support<sup>14</sup>. The support intended to build administrative and operational capacities of service-delivery NGOs, with strong record of concrete outputs and connections with the communities. Organizations promoting human rights campaigns were often sidelined during grants distribution, excuse being that their activities were already sponsored by large international donors<sup>15</sup>. This clearly demonstrates that authorities preferred to invest in service-delivery organizations rather than in human rights advocates playing the role of a watchdog.

Fundacion Secretariado Gitano (FSG) is one of the selected NGOs representing specific interests of Roma communities. In 1997 it ran a successful pilot project INTEGRA that was presented to the Ministry of Labor as a template for mainstream activities in the area of employment-inclusion. After numerous meetings, presentations and discussion with the Ministry, the innovative proposal was accepted mainly because of the need to revitalize approach to Roma

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<sup>13</sup> Caritas produced a comprehensive Plan proposal (Cartias 2001) for social-inclusion intervention. This document was highly critical towards the existing policies of social inclusion in Spain, but many of its proposals were incorporated into the final version of the Spanish social-inclusion strategy. This lack of comprehensive proposals by the Spanish government greatly explains why NGOs such as Cartias tool a leading role in the elaboration of the strategies (Razon y Fe 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 2000s majority of these NGOs diversified their funding however it is still explicit that central government is the main supporters (see FSG 2004-2009 Annual Reports).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with NGO worker, Toledo 2011

communities embedded in The National Program for the Development of Roma<sup>16</sup>. The proposal also appealed to the Ministry because of its focus on employment-insertion, a tool the government intended to promote in its National Strategy for Social-Inclusion. Although the project focused on helping Spanish Roma find long-term employment, it ascribed to multicultural methodology, meaning it also targeted non-Roma population requiring similar assistance, while its management team was composed of Roma and non-Roma staff<sup>17</sup>. This in many ways eased the worries of the government that the presence of FSG at the central level will set off ethnic sentiments, a development Labor Ministry was determined to avoid<sup>18</sup>. Many argued that Roma angle was presented as a secondary dimension, in a plan much more focused on general labor-inclusion and on mending gaps in the welfare state provisions<sup>19</sup>.

Looking at the selection of partners it is fair to say that central state recruited limited number of organizations with extensive CVs in service delivery and capacity to propose innovative strategies derived from successful pilot projects. It opted for well-established organizations<sup>20</sup>, experienced in implementing governmental funding and championing moderate ideologies. Even though the state was looking for innovative ways for addressing social-inclusion and was quite open to criticism it preferred to work with organizations that adhere to 'established norms' rather

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<sup>16</sup> The National Program for the Development of Roma (NPDR) was implemented in 1988 and marked an important turning point in recognizing the exclusion of Roma and formulating policy strategies (Villareal 2001). The main goals of the NPDR were to improve the quality of life for Roma, foster equal opportunities, promote the inclusion of Roma in Spanish society, and improve relations between Roma and non-Roma. Despite improvements and government policy efforts, the exclusion and poverty of Roma in Spain persisted in many areas, suggesting that continued and specific actions were still needed to further improve their welfare.

<sup>17</sup> In keeping with its emphasis on intercultural collaboration, a Board of Trustees, half of whom were Roma, governs the FSG. In 2001, roughly 40 percent of the 647 members of the total staff were Roma; and 67 percent of the total were women.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a senior public servant Ministry of Labor and Immigration Madrid 2011

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Roma State Council official

<sup>20</sup> FSG began operating during the mid-1960s but did not become a legal entity until 1982. FSG activities have been growing steadily over the last 38 years, with significant expansion in the last couple of years. The expansion corresponds with the newly formed arrangements with the state and regional authorities. Just between 2000 and 2001 financing for projects increased from around 4.6 million euros to 8.4 million euros. The majority of the financing came from the Spanish central government (roughly 36 percent), from the European Social Fund (approximately 27 percent) and from autonomous communities and local governments (around 36 percent).

than radical factions and minority rights activists<sup>21</sup>. Thematic operation of NGOs seemed to be a very important eligibility factor, as the government sought expertise in areas traditionally bypassed by its welfare state activities such as, environmental protection, migration, and Roma-inclusion.<sup>22</sup> It became evident that the government partnered up with organizations that provided socio-economic services to the Roma rather than forming alliances with Roma representatives or community groups and grassroots actors.

### ***Slovakia***

Slovakia is a centralized state, with weak tradition of engagement and cooperation with regional, local and non-governmental actors. Presented with the European conditionality the government was inclined to transpose partnership principle into its domestic regulations, however, as late as 2006 there was no concrete strategy for the involvement of sub-national actors (self-governing bodies) or civil society. Most of the participation took place in the Monitoring Committees (MC), introduced as the main institutional expressions of partnership. Each OP established its own MC to secure involvement of diverse actors representing different themes and interests. The selection of participants was conducted in an ad-hock manner, as the Managing Authorities handpicked MC members without providing a concrete rationale for particular choices (Batory and Cartwright 2010). During the 2007-2013 funding period a coalition of CSOs at the Governmental Council for NGOs (an advisory body of the government) proposed a uniform system for delegating MCs members and for increasing the number of participants. Despite numerous problems and set back, the selection process became more transparent and opened-up to a growing number of actors representing diverse sectors, policy areas and public interests.

Representation of Roma interests inside MC appeared very diverse.

Participating organizations represented various geographical areas and diverse

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with senior public servant Ministry of Labor and Immigration Madrid 2011

<sup>22</sup> Although the Roma community has benefitted from the expansion of the Welfare State they experienced greater disadvantages than other citizens. A number of ethnographic researches and program evaluations (Rodriguez 2009) demonstrated continuous gaps between Roma communities and public institutions. The government saw SF and its National Plan for Social Inclusion as instruments to mend this gap. For that however involvement of NGOs was considered indispensable.

policy areas. Working groups consisted of organizations running community centers, promoting civic rights activism and/or organizing cultural events as well as providers of education services, housing developers, legal issues specialists and volunteers active in charity work<sup>23</sup>. Participants were often not part of any larger networks or policy coalitions, and they had difficulty arriving at common frameworks for action. Subsequently they failed to provide concrete recommendation or outline long-term strategies. As one participant stated ‘we were all just talking about our own problems and little effort was made to vote in a concrete plan’.<sup>24</sup> The inability to formulate a common stance on the issue was further distressed by the fact that ‘mainstream’ NGOs were not prepared (or willing) to incorporate Roma issues inside their agendas. Nevertheless, numerous Roma activists claimed that ‘given the size of the Roma population and the scope of problems they face, the representational sample was simply too small’.<sup>25</sup>

The openness to such variety could be ascribed to prevailing discourse (often imposed from above by the EU and large international organizations) that Roma-exclusion should be addressed by Roma-run NGOs rather than by ‘mainstream’ organizations active in particular thematic areas.<sup>26</sup> Such approach was suppose to offset the ‘ethno-business’ dynamics whereby well-organized non-Roma NGOs received SF for their alleged work with the communities, thus pushing out smaller Roma-run initiatives and dwarfing formation of grass-root social capital (Guy 2011). Furthermore the selection was justified on the grounds that Roma is a diverse ethnic

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly enough despite escalating unemployment among Roma communities (Guy 2010), the participants in MC for the OP Employment and Social Inclusion were not active in provision of employment services nor did they present any strategies for generating employment (Minutes 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with NGO manager (Kosice 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Interviews with NGOs Roma Institute, Parlament romskych osad, People in Need, Associaiton of Young Roma, Bratislava 2011

<sup>26</sup> In 2009 there were more than 260 registered NGO identified as Roma-led. Only few of them provide sustainable services in the communities (housing, employment schemes, health centers etc.). The intercultural approach continues to be absent in many areas and there are very few mixed, local NGOs that work with Roma. Although the situation is slowly changing in the first funding period there was almost no collaboration between Roma and non-Roma NGSs. In fact there was very little networking among NGOs dealing with Roma issues in general. – Interview Opens Society Found, Bratislava 2011



minority in need of diverse representation and complex set of solutions to address multidimensional aspect of socio-economic exclusion<sup>27</sup>.

It could be said that the excitement and new opportunities to 'talk' overshadow pragmatic need of sound coordination mechanisms and usefulness of clear-cut agenda. Moreover, the notion that Roma problems need to be addressed by Roma representatives largely hindered an inter-cultural dialogue and allowed the government to 'off-load' responsibilities onto an inexperienced, weakly resourced and fragmented third sector. As one commentator pointed out '...being Roma was the only prerequisite for serving as a representative of Roma issues when interacting with the government.... little efforts were made to check the legitimacy of participants' claims or provide badly needed resources that would allow grassroots leaders to participate on equal terms with the bureaucrats.'<sup>28</sup> Numerous organizations claimed that they received material for review a day before a meeting making formulation of a stance virtually impossible others claimed that they were unable to leave their responsibilities and travel to Bratislava or simply could not afford the trip<sup>29</sup>.

Slovakia's post-1989 governments showed varying levels of interest in engaging Roma (SL), however the concrete initiatives intensified in the late 1990s under Dzurinda administration, with the introduction of the new document *Slovak Government for Solving the Problems of the Roma and the Set of Implementation Measures*. The document emphasized the need to involve Roma representatives in policy-making schemes, even though who and how was to be involved was not specified. Instead of turning directly to Roma representation the government set up *The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Romani Communities*, that was suppose to play a major role in establishing contacts with Roma communities and drawing up a strategy for solving the problems of the Roma minority. It was to gather filed information and study the effectiveness of individual measures pertaining to Roma communities. The Office setout to create links between

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with senior public servants in Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (Managing Authority for European Social Fund)

<sup>28</sup> Interview with an official from Found for Social Development, Bratislava 2011

<sup>29</sup> Interviews conducted in Banska Bystrica, Presov, Kosice 2011

communities, regional self-governments and civil society organizations. It introduced internship programme for young Romani activists, and created the Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Affairs of Romani Communities as an advisory body to the Cabinet. It also opened a new branch in eastern Slovakia's Presov allegedly to be closer to the most marginalized communities (Friedman 2005).

However, efforts aimed at promoting Roma participation lacked systematic approach and were characterized more by ad-hock meetings with highly diverse actors than by any strategic attempt to build consensus and institutionalize exchange of information and expertise. Some critics argue that the Office lacked capacities to serve as a focal point of such network building while others point to politicization of the post and lack of autonomy to withstand political volatility<sup>30</sup>. Numerous critics also argued that the Office supported by international organizations, like the Open Society Institute, was more focused on 'engineering Romani activism' and 'building political elite' than on designing strategies for socio-economic intervention through networking and capacity building activities. Finally, an escalating conflict between the Office and the cabinet severely undermined the legitimacy of the former as a true representative of Roma issues and curtail its ability to serve as contact point for diverse Roma interests.<sup>31</sup>

Thus it appears that the selection of partners was largely driven by ad-hock initiatives, focused on involving a variety of Roma-owned entities often susceptible to political interests. Little effort was made to evaluate the work of potential partners, as 'ethnic-identity' became the leading criteria for selection. Thematic area of operation (or service-delivery profile) was not prioritized and in fact groups

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<sup>30</sup> Interviews with NGOs Roma Institute, Parlament romskych osad, People in Need, Associaiton of Young Roma, Bratislava 2011

<sup>31</sup> Following the September 2002 parliamentary elections, the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary was transferred from the authority of the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development to that of the Prime Minister. The new Cabinet redefined the Office's areas of responsibilities in relationship to regional level government bodies, creating discontinuity in policy development. Later in 2002, strife within the Cabinet over the institutional framework within which the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary should operate led the World Bank to withdraw its funding for the Office, and this funding was not replaced by state budget resources (Friedman 2005).

with cultural agenda were preferred<sup>32</sup>. Although this pluralist approach was at first praised by numerous scholars and Roma advocates, as a way to engage all Roma communities without biases related to power and influence, it soon became evident that overly miscellaneous representation needs strong coordination and strategic leadership. The scheme to 'involve all' has backfired and it appears that 'bureaucrats and individuals continued to run the show while general public continued to sit still'<sup>33</sup>.

### **Partnership Modes**

Of course being selected as partners does not automatically translate in possessing enough capacity to inform policy-making and influence the outcomes. More often than not participants appear to have no real expectation of influencing public action at all. Consultancies common in the SF programming often fail to endow consultants with any real control while many partnerships exist only on paper due to lack of institutional structures and clear mandates. Less commonly, partners exercise direct power through co-governing partnership in which they join with officials to make plans and policies or to develop strategies for SF action. Thus it is important to investigate which modes appear more effective in driving policy change, and whether these can be correlated in any way with the number of participants on the scene.

### ***Spain***

The selection process was followed by a period of intense institutionalization of partnership and a 'division of labor' among the stakeholders. Primary negotiations commenced in 1999 via two meetings opened to Ministries, NGOs and Autonomous Communities. Bilateral meetings also took place although largely behind closed doors<sup>34</sup>. The product of these interactions was the establishment of

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<sup>32</sup> This could be explained that a lot of cultural NGOs working to promote Roma ethnicity received funding from international donors and thus had more resources to interact with the ministries. More critical commentators have argued that focus on minority rights and culture becomes a strategy of the neo-liberal governance, reluctant to expand welfare expenditures or recognize socio-economic inclusion as a right (Guy 2011; Kovats 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Interview Roma Institute (Bratislava 2011)

<sup>34</sup> This was highly criticized by civic organizations that claimed they were excluded from 'influencing next period of SF'. However, central public authorities claimed that they were open to meetings and

Multi-Regional OP *Fight Against Discrimination (FAD)*, as an instrument to address socio-economic exclusion that transgresses territorial boundaries. It was also suppose to offset regional rivalries and channel SF directly to civil society, civic representatives and municipalities that addressed socio-economic exclusion in their agendas<sup>35</sup>. Not surprisingly representatives of Autonomous Communities argued against creation of multi-regional OP that according to them aimed at re-centralized social policy and stall or even revers decentralization processes. In order to pacify these fears the Ministries placed a large share of control over the OP into the hands of NGOs and made collaboration between them and regional authorities a legal requirement. The Ministry themselves argued that NGOs involvement was necessary to ‘generate knowledge transfer from the deprived areas and enhance targeting of SF to micro-regions and thematic groups’<sup>36</sup>. As the interviewed official from MA stated ‘our staff is not able to properly assess necessary interventions without help from those actors who actually work with the communities and deliver services directly to them.... We can create frameworks, deal with procedural issues but at the end of the day we need competent advisors with solid experience and direct access to excluded groups’. Thus focus on generating knowledge was placed in the center of NGOs involvement.

It is important to note, however, that NGOs themselves were the leading ‘lobbyists’ for multiregional OP. Collaborating together they presented the government with a coherent social-inclusion strategy and negotiated with public authority using ‘one voice’. Solidarity of general NGOs with Roma people has been a prominent feature of Spanish civil society and was often presented as a promising aspect of ‘the Spanish model’ for Roma-inclusion. It avoided building of ethnic organizations that allegedly condemn to isolation the Roma community (Cabrera 2011). The State Council of Social Action NGOs, the EAPN-Spain, the Volunteer’s Platform, SOS Racism, have undertaken the majority of campaigning for the Roma community and, jointly, incorporated Roma issues into civic dialogue that aimed to

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it was the Autonomous Communities that did not ‘grab the opportunity’ to send over interested agents.

<sup>35</sup> Interview Fundacion Secretariado Gitano Madrid 2011

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Ministry of Labor and Immigration, Madrid 2011

inform major decisions over social policies. This in turn gave NGOs leverage in negotiating with the state.

The Managing Authority of the OP FAD was placed within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and the OP was divided in parts, and set up in such a way as to allow direct control of its parts by programme partners. The Intermediate Bodies were set up composed of five public agencies and five NGOs including ONCE, Luis Vives, Caritas, Red Cross and Fundacion Secretariado Gitano. The Intermediate Bodies became responsible for overseeing the design of the OP priorities, formulation of selection criteria, implementation of specific programs and projects and their evaluation (Art. 12/1083/2000). They received a part of ESF budget, which they could allocate (in line with OP objectives) for in-house run projects, or projects co-financed by Autonomous Communities, municipalities and other civil society organizations. Although the NGOs did not receive a veto power over decisions about OP design, the whole process relied on consensual decision-making. Interviewees commonly agreed that there was little tension during deliberation and the Managing Authorities were quite receiving to proposed ideas<sup>37</sup>. Although critics argued that other actors (municipalities and civic associations) were largely excluded and had no authority over final decisions, they were offered a chance to participate as consultants within Monitoring Committees. The Spanish SF partnership mode, as a whole appeared more inclusive in the 'design stage' where different actors were asked for their inputs (through Monitoring Committees). The implementation stage was largely controlled by public authorities from the regional tiers that acted as strategic leaders and the main coordinators and evaluators of SF projects. In many ways these approach prevented the fragmentation and duplication of the SF interventions but often at the price of more experimental methodologies and inventive pilot projects.

Another step in consolidating partnership with civil society and sub-national interests was the creation of another multi-national OP *Technical Support*. The aim of this OP was to build administrative capacities of local NGOs, smaller

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with FSG, CARITAS and Red Cross Madrid 2011

municipalities and a myriad of civic associations. One of the rationales was that weaker and less organized entities need support to be able to engage with public bureaucracies and in turn bring in contextual knowledge and local expertise into the policy-making apparatus. Technical Support was established to enhance coordination and communication between different OPs through creation of indicators, horizontal targets, and common methodologies. Technical Support also aimed to finance situational studies, household surveys, impact evaluations and other data collection methods in order to develop better understanding of local contexts and utilize this information when creating strategies, selection criteria etc. Special focus was placed on facilitating better ex-ante and post-ante evaluation of SF programs. The management of the OP was similar to the FAD however it only provided for one intermediate body – the Fundacion Secretariado Gitano. The fact that organization working with Roma issues was nominated for this post has had a substantial impact on promoting further action targeting this ethnic group. FSG was able to earmark funds for research and data collection, and provide assistance to organizations dealing specifically with Roma communities – such as Fakali or Mujeres Gitanas. It also became a leader of EURoma, an international initiative set up with the ESF support to evaluate SF interventions in the area of Roma Inclusion, disseminate good practices and provide technical support for Roma initiatives in other countries (EURoma 2010).

Spanish partnership practices resemble co-productive modes between public and third-sector organizations. The co-productive arrangements operate through stable networks of communication and joint working, secured by legal provisions. Public bureaucracies provide resources to external stakeholders that enable them to access public procedures and feed-in knowledge and expertise to policy-making apparatus. In co-productive modes all the involved parties have both the authority and the institutional flexibility to engage in mutual decision-making and resource sharing. Partners informed the choice of projects in cases where the programmes pre-identify some of these. By getting involved in the early stages of project selection, for instance advising Managing Authorities on eligibility and selection criteria, partners support the targeting of calls for tenders to encourage the effective

take-up capacity and needs of the target recipients, thus strengthening programs' ability to reach expenditure and outcome goals.

Many critics continue to argue that large national NGOs such as FSG are not representative of the local interests and most excluded groups as they first and foremost represent interests of the state. Many of them point to the almost total exclusion of civic associations and the *camarcas* (local representative unit) from influencing the 2000-2006 funding agenda.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, looking at FSGs' extensive networks with local NGOs, and Roma communities associations as well as the growing impact of its services on Roma communities<sup>39</sup> these criticisms lose their strength even if they contain some grain of truth. FSG for the last two funding periods has been cooperating and co-producing projects with over 40 city halls, over 50 NGOs (60 percent of which directly represent Roma communities) in 6 different regions, and over 40 private companies. All the implemented projects directly and indirectly target Roma communities and individuals, while the number of beneficiaries of Roma origin continues to grow<sup>40</sup>. Thus small number of actors with common objectives and decision-making authority proved ideal for allocating funds to projects targeting Roma socio-economic situation at the price of strengthening political activism.

### ***Slovakia***

In the 2004-2006 funding period institutionalization of partnership in Slovakia was again dominated by ad hoc efforts lacking strategic vision and commitment. The authorities were reluctant to shift decision-making to actors far removed from the center and appeared even more unwilling to provide resources critically needed to build capacity in the third sector perturbed by fragmentation, lack of experience and administrative capacity. There was a sentiment that since partnership principle

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<sup>38</sup> They were at best beneficiaries of the SF after winning tenders and project competitions Interview with senior public servant from Deputacion De Sevilla 2011

<sup>39</sup> See Annual Reports at [www.gitanos.org](http://www.gitanos.org)

<sup>40</sup> The FSG evaluation reports point that the number of direct Roma beneficiaries in the 2000-2006 funding period reached close to 27,000. In the second period it almost doubled. Data also shows that the number of projects that target social-inclusion increased by 60 percent between the two funding periods. In the 2000-2006 period FSG as an Intermediate Body absorbed all the SF allocated to them what resulted in an interesting scenario as MA decided to allocate more funds to social-inclusion initiatives (from central budget and 'left over' SF)

has been transferred into national legislation, the government has done its part and now it is up to the local actors to organize effectively and use the 'new found' opportunities<sup>41</sup>. Thus partnership may have given third sector actors an entitlement to participate, but has not provide instruments which would allow them to access and use their 'right' effectively.

The MCs with the prerogatives in overseeing (and to a lesser extent shaping) the OPs design and implementation at least in principle gave the third sector organization considerable leverage on public officials and Managing Authorities. However the resource imbalance vis-à-vis the public servants in terms of time, information and expertise constituted a major constraint for actors outside central governments. Numerous small NGOs pointed out how difficult if not impossible it was to keep up with MA's officials in understanding the complex technical documentation (Batory and Cartwright 2011). The situation was aggravated by delays in provision of documents needed to prepare for meetings and lack of contact points where non-governmental actors could gain information and assistance. The fact that MC meetings took place only three times a year often resulted in decisions being taken outside the framework of the MC. Despite the fact that attitudes among the officials towards MCs seemed to shift there is little concrete evidence that non-governmental actors representing Roma interests have managed to shape SF programing in any meaningful way.

The ability of Plenipotentiary to influence the SF agenda was also limited given the lack of any substantial decision-making capacity. Serving the role of a consultant and coordinator for Roma issues it did not posses a strong enough leverage to deeply anchor Roma interests on the SF agenda. Nevertheless, even with its limited competencies the Office, supported by European Commission managed to draft a 'Comprehensive Approach to Roma Inclusion' that in 2006 was incorporated into OP Employment and Social Inclusion as a horizontal priority 'Marginalized Roma Communities' for 2007-2013 funding period. A number of consultations with the civil society organizations took place however often in an informal setting. It is

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with officials from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic (Managing Authorities of Regional Operational Programme) Bratislava 2011



important to mention that a number of NGOs with long standing, as service providers were often by-passed in favor of small entities and individuals claiming to be 'leaders'<sup>42</sup>.

The horizontal priority conceptualized participation of Roma mostly as tenders and final beneficiaries and not as active architects of the OPs, project calls and selection criteria. The overwhelming majority of projects targeting Roma directly or with a Roma dimension have been managed locally, with direct ESF co-financing, but no money from the state budget and minimum (required by EC regulation) oversight from the MA. Thus it could be said that Slovak model of participation was more inclusive in the implementation stage giving direct control to tenders while the design stage was dominated by public authorities with minimal input from non-governmental entities and sub-national actors.

Such division of labour often resulted in highly diverse interventions covering a wide range of services including, professional trainings, social-enterprises, individualized vocational activation, social work inside communities, creation of community centers, employment centers and information points. Given the limited financial support from the state, and dwindling technical assistance from international organizations, majority of the projects ran small-scale operation without possibility to present impressive results or conduct impact evaluations<sup>43</sup>. Moreover the diversity of intervention, often based on different set of goals, expertise and procedures have not reinforced creation of linkages between different tenders what in turn seriously hindered potential for lesson learning, and development inter-organizational trust. On many occasions tenders were unable to secure co-financing or even absorb the already allocated funds, jeopardizing their credibility and sustainability of projects. It appeared that SF have failed to reach the most needy groups and reached specified targets.

This realization lead to a change of strategy and in 2008 The Office of

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<sup>42</sup> Interview conducted with People in Need (July 2011 Bratislava).

<sup>43</sup> MA reports state that 81 projects were completed in 2008. Of these 81 projects, 17 targeted Roma directly. A total of close to 53,000 beneficiaries were observed or planned for all projects. Projects targeting Roma directly benefitted or aimed to benefit an aggregate total of 7,907 persons. This kind of data is common, skillfully masking the lack of concrete impact evaluations. It is fair to say that at this point the government has difficulties providing any real numbers of actual beneficiaries.

Plenipotentiary issued a call to all localities with substantial Roma population inviting them to prepare 'Local Strategies' that would be reviewed by the Office and if accepted would receive SF funding earmarked for that purpose. The idea was to allow interested localities and NGOs by-pass a lot of procedural prerequisites and receive funding for tailored interventions, what in turn was suppose to generate 'ownership' of SF and community involvement. The call generated a lot of interests especially given a fairly low 'criteria' for acceptance and relative interest of international community that provided a fare amount of technical assistance (SDF 2010). It quickly became evident that the Office had no capacity to coordinate the process and answer to a growing number of interested parties let alone review a growing pile of local strategies (the office has only 10 full-time and 2 part-time employee). A lot of inquiries were left unanswered, communication channels were blocked and deadlines not respected<sup>44</sup>. This situation not only generated frustration among the localities but also jeopardizing transfer of funds earmarked by the MA for the horizontal priority. The Plenipotentiary was unable to compel the government to provide critically needed assistance or even to delay deadlines for the open-calls. The overload problems were aggravated by little cooperation among the localities and lack of overarching vision about social-inclusion of Roma. Roma-run NGOs received little support from general NGOs and vice versa, while an ongoing and stifling debate about the 'best way to address Roma exclusion' hampered creation of a unified position. In the end most of the earmarked money was spent on general calls generating further frustration and resulting in mutual accusations and finger pointing<sup>45</sup>.

Judging from the above illustrations, partnership arrangements in Slovakia have not been institutionalized as the authorities failed to provide new partners with mandates, clearly defined competencies and capacities to engage in policy-making processes. The central authorities continue to dominate the design of OPs with limited input of the MC. This reliance on consultations began to be mocked by

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with the Office of Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, Bratislava 2011

<sup>45</sup> In April 2012, one year before the end of the programming period, only some 16 million out of the allocated 200 million had been contracted by Local Strategies (mostly of which due not meet all the imposed criteria).

the Roma representatives, some going as far as to accuse the national actors for playing institutional 'power games' and aggravating 'democratic deficit'. Numerous Roma activists commented that while the priorities and political commitments to include Roma voices look nice on paper, they are rarely implemented while participation channels cater to the selected few (EURoma 2010).

Although Roma interests were welcomed to participate as tenders they had not received any technical assistance from the government and the Plenipotentiary Office was simply too weak to meet the demands of the diverse localities. The absence of co-productive mechanisms in the implementation of SF results in Roma-inclusion interventions that were often ill suited, not well targeted and short-lived. Moreover delays and inconsistencies in issuing calls targeting Roma generated skepticism about 'ability to change things' among local actors, preventing them from increasing their scope of activities. Little cooperation on the ground among the NGOs and localities results in fragmentation of initiatives, conflict over constituencies and deepening divide between the Roma and non-Roma communities. This overall communication failure resulted in SF bypassing the most impoverished Roma communities, and generating further inter-cultural divisions.

### **Concluding Arguments**

The above section demonstrated that while Spain decided to cooperate with small group of experienced service deliverers, Slovakia opened participation channels to vastly diverse stakeholders exhibiting different capacities and interests. Although the Slovak approach appeared more inclusive it was severely hindered by lack of clear-cut strategies for involvement and inadequate support for the organizations that lacked resources and concrete experience in interacting with public authorities. Spanish government on the other hand actively engaged its resources to build organizational capacities of the actors who were able to demonstrate concrete achievements in the area of social exclusion. The presence of common and complementary goals was prioritized over ethnic identity of the organizations or their record in championing citizenship rights. Slovakian adherence to the notions that Roma representatives should champion Roma issues led the state to interact with actors who often could not contribute much more to

the debate than their ethnic status. Fragmentation of interests, power asymmetries and lack of common agreement on what needed to be done created confusion, disagreements and general atmosphere of mistrust. As Spain entered into negotiations with non-governmental organizations over the best ways to apply SF for Roma-inclusion, Slovakian government simply 'waited' for interested parties to come up with proposals without providing any structured leadership. Creation of governmental agencies to enhance participation of Roma appeared helpful only on paper as they lacked proper mandates and ability to forge networks with local actors able to bring in contextual knowledge and years of experience working in the field.

The partnership modes also differed substantially. Spanish partnership began to resemble a corporatist models where co-productive arrangement make new partners at once more capable of influencing decision-making and more dependent on state's budget. As such the non-governmental organizations lost a lot of their autonomy but at the same time were able to expand the scope and capacity of their services. Becoming responsible for managing OPs gave them direct control over selection processes and somewhat indirectly enhanced their linkages to the regional and sub-regional actors. Clear allocation of roles and responsibilities allowed for coordination of skills and expertise in a stable environment based on trust and mutual recognition. This also made all partners equally responsible for outputs what substantially curtailed off-loading tendencies and finger-pointing when problems arisen. Slovak government on the other hand continued to rely on ad hoc interactions reluctant to grant decision-making authority to an increasing number of contenders. Thus the partners appear to have strictly 'observational role' without any substantial leverage to influence policy agenda. Managing Authorities remained the driving force of SF programming and rarely did their interests and objectives aligned with those of potential tenders and beneficiaries. That created conflicts aggravated by lack of communication and coordination. It seems that OPs continued to be designed in offices far removed from local contexts and continued to produce interventions that missed intended targets and envisioned outcomes. Such

dynamics contributed to dwindling trust and spreading sentiment that there are no solutions for Roma problems.

Thus Spanish case emerges as a success with its exclusive partnership made-up of professional organizations willing to accept and tailor state's objectives to the needs of excluded groups. This corporatist arrangement proved very beneficial for socio-economic interests of Roma population who could now benefit from a growing number of SF programs and initiatives. It also demonstrated that top-down initiatives are not always oblivious to the needs of the population and the state can play a significant role in transforming approaches to social-inclusion. Absence of such strategic leadership breeds confusion and conflict experienced in the Slovak case. It also shows that less-organized interests need assistance from the government to interact with complex and demanding SF procedures. These demonstrations are especially relevant considering a rather uncritical insistence that proliferation of Roma participation through partnership constitutes a miracle cure for a host of ills inherent to earmarking SF to Roma-inclusion. They also highlights an important role of the state arguing that administering of SF is very much contingent on top-down dynamics rather than bottom-up mobilization.

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