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### **The worth of cultural identity in sustainable development process**

*Ethnicity, power and self-determination opportunities in the post-Soviet Crimea*

#### **Abstract**

This study has been produced for the purpose and with the hope of furthering the dialogue on the importance of cultural identities in development processes. The key premise is that it is crucial encouraging people in building on their personal human experiences and values, defining their requirements and dealing with them to find the apposite satisfactory solutions. But often, the self-determination opportunities depend on the power of identity in the socio-political system. So, for example, the pervasive and persistent Russian-Soviet strength of mind in Crimea plays the main role in its historic context of multi-ethnic coexistence and it implies a strong influence on the cultivation of the individual dispositions as well as the creation of constant tension between the different ethnics. However the recent local UNDP experiences are proving that peace, stability and respect for cultural differences are possible when people work together for solving common problems concerning their life.

Key words: sustainable development, cultural identity, memory, history, ethnic power.

#### **1. Sustainability as reason of human development**

Sustainability is a conscientious proposal for thinking and making to deal responsibly with our ambitions. The idea has gained a considerable political attention

since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The summit marked the first international attempt to draw up action plans and strategies for moving towards *“processes of change in which the exploitation of resources the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations”* (WCED, 1987).

Despite the apparent simplicity, the definition itself is rather relevant because takes cognizance of the followings important factors:

- no interdependence between economic growth and improvement of people's lives;
- relationship between poverty and resources management;
- interconnection between social and ecological problems;
- inexistence of geographic boundaries in planet stresses;
- inadequacy of conventional stereotypes of development;
- exigency of systemic and shared solutions.

It also contains within it two key concepts:

- needs, *“basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations for a better life”*;
- limits, *“not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities”*.

It means that changes must be:

- consistent with the core values, expectations, and mores of the community (*cultural dimension*);
- increasing the maintenance of environmental quality (*ecological dimension*);
- oriented towards alleviation of poverty(*economic dimension*);
- built on citizenship and integrated with civil society (*political dimension*).

All suggests that sustainable development vision places particular emphasis upon a better estimation of human dignity. Anyway, it depends on the institutions themselves in

terms of their fairness process. According to Amartya Sen (A. Sen, 1999:155), democracy can instrumentally open up the possibility of implementing helpful policies, but it is also important the way certain opportunities are (or can be) used by people. In other words, to address the issue of human development it is necessary treating the importance of the freedom to choose and achieve the life that one finds truly valuable to live. Sen notes, *“the people have to be seen, in this perspective, as being actively involved – given the opportunity – in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs”* (A. Sen, 1999:53).

Beside, we have to consider that poverty has many aspects and dimensions because people feel subjectively distinct forms of deprivation. Anyway the poor is not ignorant of his condition: he knows what he needs but the sense of misery often is so pervasive that he cannot achieve the concrete power or capability to transform it. For this reason, securing the basic capabilities of people has to be the task of our political and social institutions. Defining and measuring human needs is far from simple but, according to Manfred Max-Neef, humanity has been developing certain needs that maintain their character throughout time and across cultures (M. Max-Neef, 1991:18). So, it is possible to distinguish: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom. The commitment to the realization of these ethical responsibilities could ensure a life worth living for all and a truly human world for each and every single person.

## **2 - What difference cultural identity can make?**

The 1990 Human Development Report begins with the statement, *“people are the real wealth of a nation”* and, in this connection, article 10 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (Mexico City, 1982) proclaims:

*“Culture constitutes a fundamental dimension of the development process and helps to strengthen the independence, sovereignty and identity of nations. Growth has frequently been conceived in quantitative terms, without taking into account its necessary qualitative dimension, namely the satisfaction of man's spiritual and cultural aspirations.*

*The aim of genuine development is the continuing well-being and fulfilment of each and every individual'.*

Following Edgar Morin it can be defined as *"the totality of knowledge, skills, rules, standards, prohibitions, strategies, beliefs, ideas, values, and myths passed from generation to generation and reproduced in each individual, that control the existence of the society and maintain psychological and social complexity"* (E. Morin, 1999:26).

Anchored in a social process entailing self-awareness, evaluation, comparison and contextualisation culture confers people sense of identity and recognition, whether at an individual or group level. The several levels of construction and confirmation follow multi-scale issues that extend from the micro-local (house, quarter) to the global one (worldwide) of varying relevance. Boundaries are drawn on the basis of all implying a classificatory system and consequently a negotiation or an enactment of power: geographical units, civilizing attributes, biological shapes, socioeconomic positions, etc. In this connection, diversity and complexity are reflections of the subject positions and the doable variations procured by the historical circumstances or the collective memory.

Ethnicity is one of the many ways in which people identify themselves (family, community, nation, class, occupation, gender, age, etc.) but it is distinct from the others because has the potential to become radical, totalizing, the central basis of identity. It is a mode of action and representation, the mark through which an *"ethnic group put its imprint on forms, values, and rhythms"* (A. Leroi-Gourhan, 1965:91). Because of it is believed as genetically given and unchangeable, ethnicity is a founding structure of social differentiation and recognition, as well as of discrimination in such cases.

As result, culture denotes the means by which people make meaning, sustain their self-definition and interrelate social liaisons. It is what enables a community to carry out plans for living together in order to respond to common ambitions and fillings of belonging. For this reason, according to Wolfgang Sachs, it could be auspicial finding *"efforts to elucidate the much broader range of futures open to societies which limit their levels of material output in order to cherish whatever ideals emerge from their cultural heritages"* (W. Sachs, 1992:36). Of course, it could give rise to the involvement of full human potential resources in terms of self-expression, creativity and innovation in social, political,

economic and ecological development. Moreover, the social disintegration and loss of culture are the most serious but invisible causes of enduring impoverishment and disempowerment.

### **3. Thinking on the contemporary multiethnic Crimean scene**

#### *3.1 - Spaces of memory and practices of recognition*

Crimea always has been a crossroad land of cultures and trades. Its ancient history registers a constant change or coexistence of different sceneries and protagonists: Cimmerians, Scythians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Jews, Poles, Armenians, Karaims, Mordovians, Tatars, Belarusians, Estonians, Bulgars, Chuvashes, Italians, Ukrainians, Russians, etc. Of course, its multiethnic establishment and socio-cultural plurality, readable through the tangible and the intangible traces of the history, constitutes an irreplaceable human heritage, at times missing or ignored or segmented or reclaimed in dependence of the emergent propensities.

But, in this sense the dynamics pertaining to how has been changing the people self-understanding after the dismantling of the Soviet Union imperative and the regained independence offer a different point of view: many still consider themselves Russian and many more are really Russian.

It is possible to presume that, because of the singular and composite occurrences, the connection between Crimea and the mainland has been always defined only just by a narrow strip of terrain. But, of course, another most relevant cause is imputable to the persistent Russian-Soviet influence. From 1920 Crimea was a part of the Russian Federation; in 1954 it was annexed to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and finally proclaimed independent under the Ukrainian jurisdiction in 1991. During the Soviet dominance the official view of events (any event or idea for the present, the past or the future) was absolute and totalitarian as well. The power itself defined what knowledge is and should be "*through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions*" (M. Foucault, 1980:152). As Catherine Wanner refers "*the process of stripping down the individuality and*

*dignity of every citizen to create homo sovieticus (Rus. sovetskij chelovek) was parallel to the process of peeling back the histories and cultures of the many nationalities in the Soviet Union to create the Soviet people (Rus. sovetskii narod). The system wanted individuals to identify with being Soviet, to see themselves as residents of a vast eleven-time-zone country on a unique mission” (C. Wanner, 1998:49).*

If we look at the vicissitudes of other nations, the revision of the history represented in different times the way by which people responded to the necessity of recognizing the past and suiting their identities. But, in this case, people unremittingly appear *"a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power ... called discipline"* (M. Foucault, 1977:194). As noted by Pierre Nora, history results a *“repository for the secrets of the present”* (P. Nora, 1989:17), opened to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting in dependence of current exigencies and ends, *“vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived”* (P. Nora, 1989:8).

So, the responsibility for remembering is delegated to the emergent priorities and in a perspective of development it could imply a lost of recognition and ownership of issues. Three options of identity building are suggested by Manuel Castells (M. Castells, 2004:8):

- *legitimizing identity*, that is introduced by the dominant institutions of society to organize and structure their domination over all actors;
- *resistance identity*, that is produced by the actors who are in positions of being debarred by the logic of an unbearable oppression;
- *project identity*, that is formulated to redefine the community’s position in the society on the basis of whatever cultural material available.

In this relation, research findings provide ample empirical evidence of the Crimean tendencies: two main and conflictive processes are taking place simultaneously. They are:

- the salient Soviet-Russian identity linkage;
- the Crimean Tatars reestablishment of the rights as indigenous people (Turkic Muslim Ethnic living in the Crimean peninsula since the thirteenth century) victims of the atrocious "ethnic cleansing" operated on Stalin's orders in 1944. Accused of

collaborating with the Germans, more than 250,000 Tatars - mostly women, children and old people - were rounded up and deported to "special zones" of Central Asian republics, mainly to Uzbekistan.

Certainly, these conflicts conceal several dynamics of interest in terms of political, interethnic and economic power. I will try to explain it in the next paragraph.

### 3.2 - Assessment and basic trends

The recorded living physiognomy confirms what said before, but it is more incisive. According to the data provided by the *2001 State Statistics Committee of Ukraine*, Crimean population consisted of 58.3% Russian, 24.3% Ukrainians, 12.0% Crimean Tatar, 1.4% Belaurusian and 4% others.

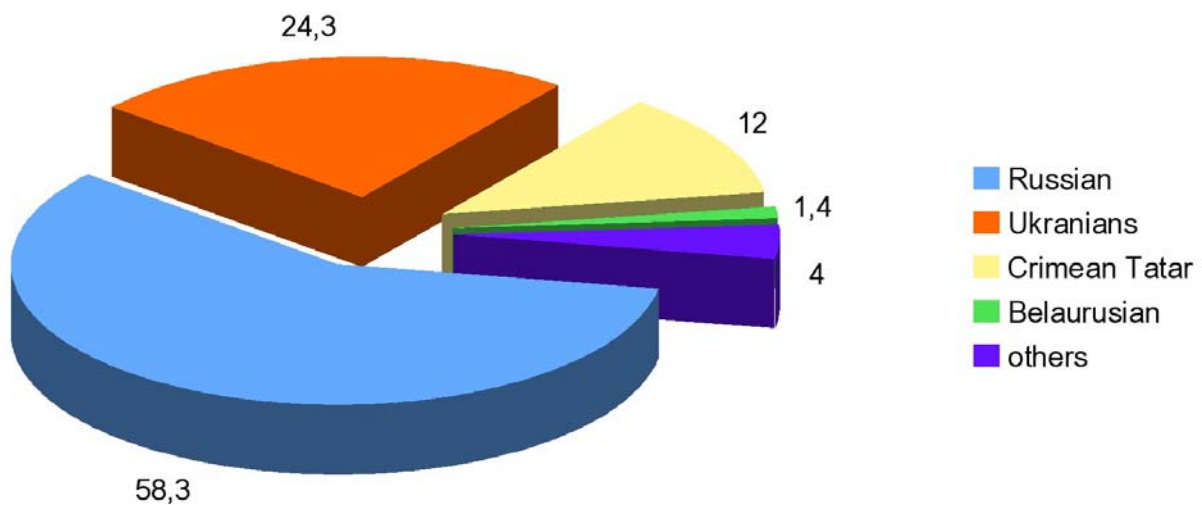


Fig. 1 - Subdivision in % of population in Crimea  
Adapted from 2001 State Statistics Committee of Ukraine

In addition, the results of the public opinion conducted by UCEPS in 2001 (diagram "*The populace's idea of the future status of Crimea*") point to strong pro-Russian spirit: almost half (47.3%) of population seeks the Crimea's unification with Russia.

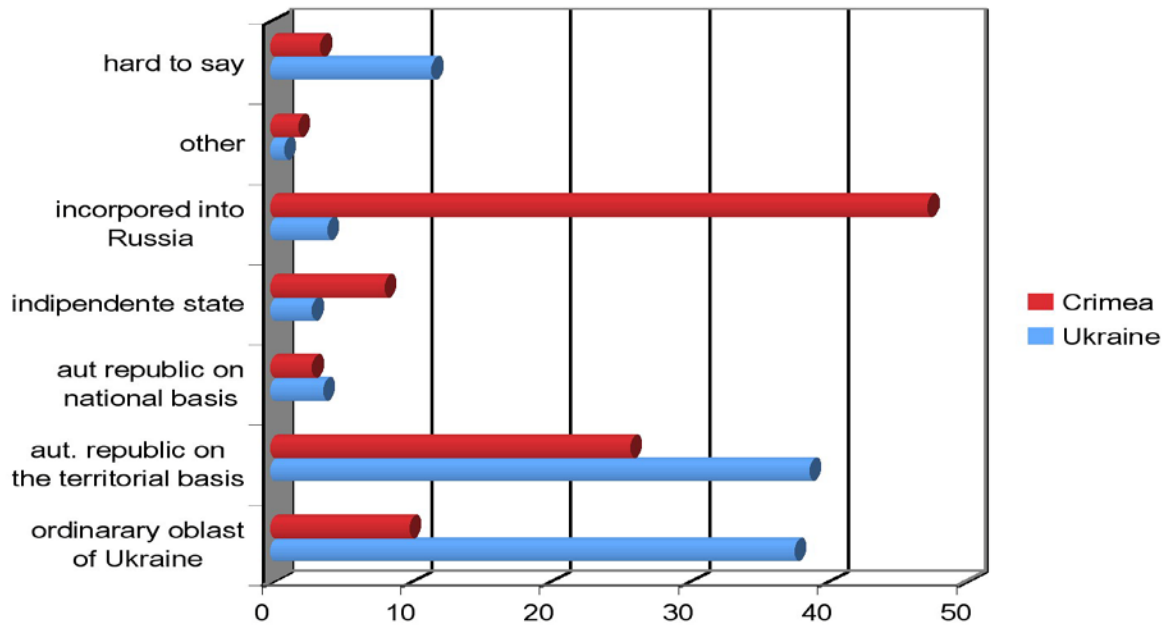


Fig. 2 – Population’s idea about the future state of Crimea (% of the polled)  
Adapted from Razumkov Centre (UCEPS), 2001:30

At the same time, the 2001 UCEPS diagram “How much are the rights of Crimean Tatars provided in Crimea?” shows that almost half of the population in Crimea (47.2%) thinks that the rights of Crimean Tatar are sufficiently guaranteed.

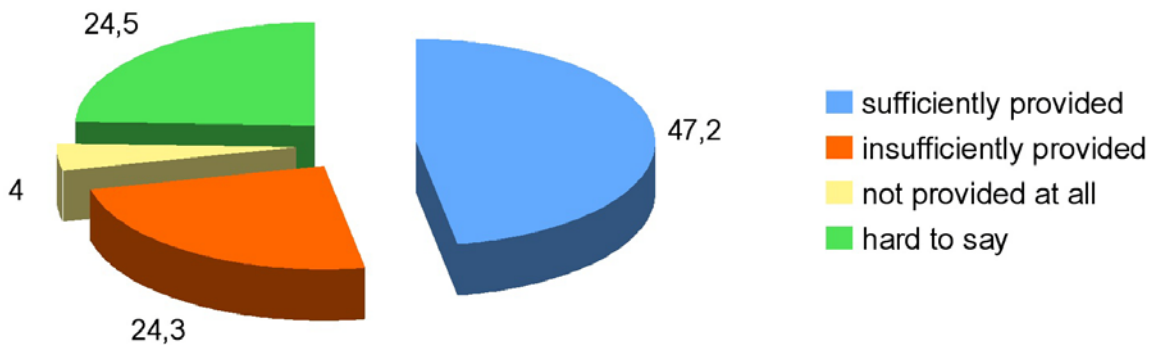


Fig. 3 - Population’s idea about the provision of Crimean Tatar’s rights (% of the polled)  
Adapted from Razumkov Centre (UCEPS), 2001:18

But, to understand better this phenomenon it is important to observe other dynamics. The 2001 UCEPS diagram “Problems that bother the Crimean population most



of all' gets out that Crimean population is foremost concerned about general decrease in living standard (66.7%) and economic problems (39.3%). They are followed by growing crime (30.8%), bribery and corruption of authorities (25.1%), declining morals (15.1%), possibility of social explosion (8.5%), etc.

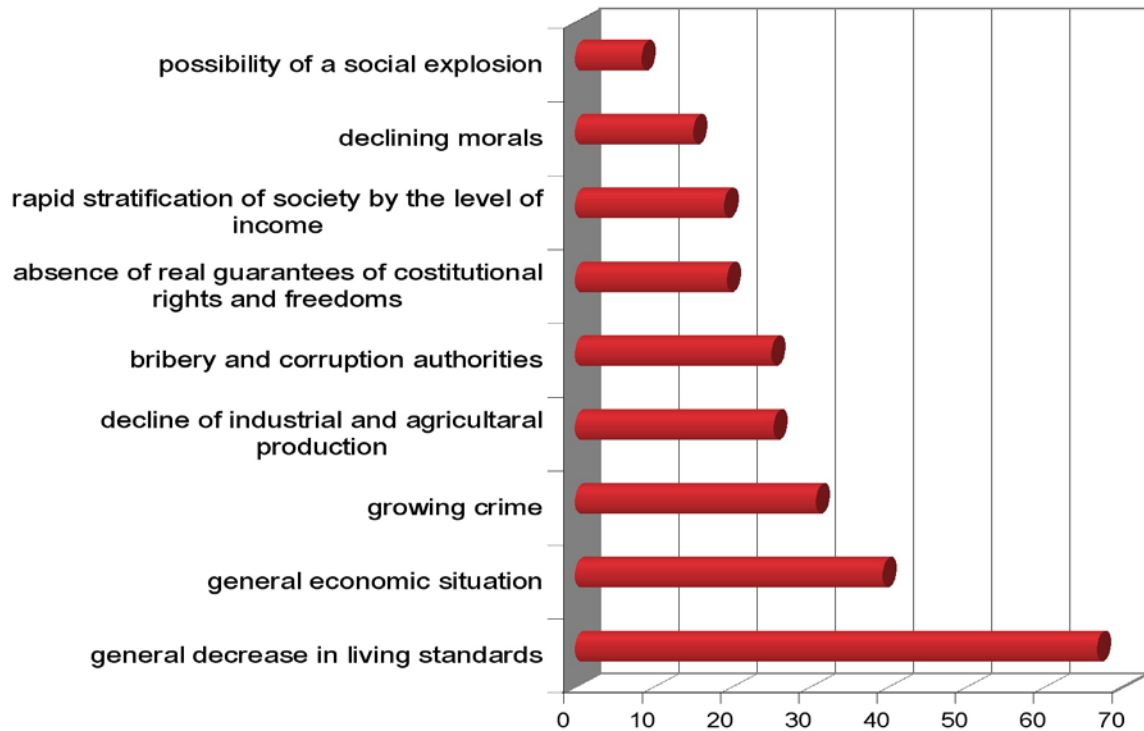


Fig. 4 - Problems that bother the population in Crimea (% of the polled)

Adapted from Razumkov Centre (UCEPS), 2001:15

In this context Russia, according to the *2001 State Statistics Committee of Ukraine*, results the main trade partner and its presence is substantial to produce beneficial opportunities. In addition, Russian is the main language adopted at school, in mass-media sectors (radio, TV, newspaper) and book market. Of course, because of the promulgation of stereotypes, these factors operate as (conscious or unconscious) monopolizing agents. So, the strong Russian linkage appears foremost associated with the increases in social status, the estimation of the economic growth and the appreciation for the geo-politic importance. On the one hand, this influence can positively contribute in strengthening financial situation, but on the other hand it is used for the escalation of political tension and the intensification of the radical separatist activity. At the same time, the Crimean Tatar movement is radically implicated in recognition of the juridical powers, the restitution of the property and the indemnification of the inflicted losses. Objectively, social and legal

limitations exist for the fulfilment of these demands and it prompts to other political tension. As well, this movement in certain circumstances is viewed as a spread for Islamic trends becoming an additional potential threat for the socio-political stability. According to the 2001 UCEPS diagram “*Influence of organised criminal groups on the political situation*”, the 47,6% of the population of Crimea agrees with that.

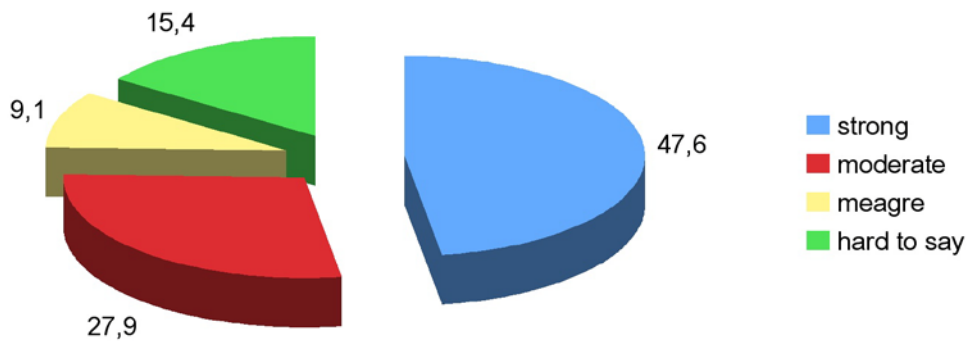


Fig. 5 - Influence of organised criminal groups on the political situation in Crimea (% of the polled)  
Adapted from Razumkov Centre (UCEPS), 2001:27

Fortunately, as showed by the 2001 UCEPS diagram “*Attitude of the population to radical actions*”, the majority of the population does not justify radical actions.

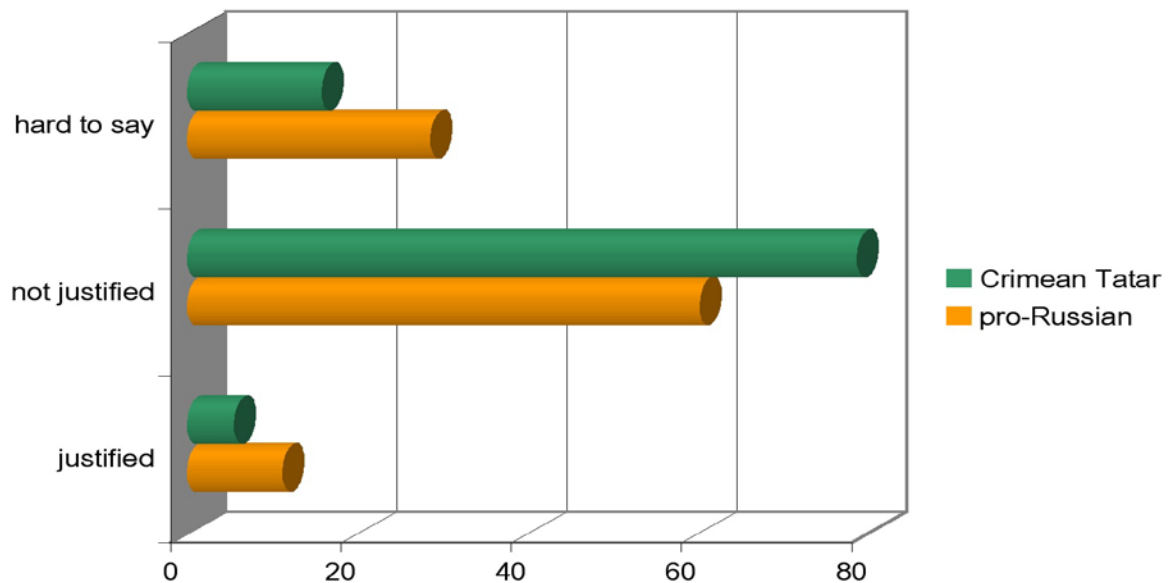


Fig. 6 - Attitude of the population to radical actions in Crimea (% of the polled)  
Adapted from Razumkov Centre (UCEPS), 2001:26

### 3.3 - *Building mutual understanding and cohesion through the development of communal infrastructure*

People in rural areas have different perceptions on whether there are tensions or not. Their existence is sited in small communities involved foremost in solving their living conditions through self-help initiatives. Anyway, the UNDP “*Approaches in Water Supply Projects for Multi-Ethnic Neighbourhoods in Crimea*” is proving that development efforts based on community involvement can contribute to a better stability and, at the same time, can provide income opportunities. In “*Peace and stability through sustainable social and economic development*” (2004) Jurg Christen refers about the UNDP experience in two pilot communities Tenistoye and Sevastyanovka. They are two small settlements in the Bakhchsarai Region of Crimea: the first one is mainly inhabited by Russian, the second one by Crimean Tatars returned 15 years ago. As in many rural villages in Crimea, the foremost problems are:

- water supplies;
- unemployment, more than 80% of the active population.

This untenable situation has naturally increased the potential for conflict by fuelling sentiments of frustration and despair amongst the 800 inhabitants of the two communities.

At the beginning of the project, in order to ensure a participatory development approach, the two communities were encouraged to organise themselves in self-governing Community Organisations (CO), to address community problems on the basis of democratic governance and the principles of transparency and accountability. After several public meetings and the identification of community needs, a so-called Functional Group (FG) - consisting of 3-5 community members having some technical knowledge related to water supply - was constituted to represent the communities’ interests throughout the planning and design process. The functional group prepared the preliminary layout plan in order to calculate the total water requirements of the community. It included: the potential water sources, the alignment of water mains, the location of proposed reservoirs, the proposed water distribution lines, the information on public and private establishments located in the project area, the livestock levels, etc. The FG also prepared a tentative cost calculation. A private consultancy firm then revised these designs, reducing the final

investment costs significantly. Subsequently, the project proposal was presented to the Regional Forum for Integration and Development and after the approval, the contracts for the implementation of the projects were stipulated through a competitive bidding. During the works all parts actively participated:

- the CO collaborated in the construction of the water distribution systems, the individual house connections and the installation of water meters;
- the local authorities (village council and regional state administration) provided vital administrative support to ensure that all legal requirements.

Before handing over the completed projects, leakage tests were conducted for pipelines and reservoirs. Water quality was tested at the source, at the reservoir and at the house tap and the projects were then handed over to Communal Enterprises (KomunKhoz) - the body responsible for the maintenance and management of rural drinking water supply systems in the village council. The village councils responsible for the two settlements are now the owners of the water supply infrastructure, and have authorized the CO to autonomously manage, operate and maintain the systems. Agreements between the village councils and the community organisations regulate their respective responsibilities - particularly in terms of land taxation, tariff setting, monitoring and reporting. Finally, it is possible to assess the following observations:

- Sufficient quantities of safe water are available for drinking, washing and irrigation.
- Houses that were abandoned or sold years ago are being bought again.
- New plans are developed to promote local enterprises such as concrete block production, carpentry, etc.
- The new service has substantially improved the quality of life in the communities.
- Agricultural production - and thus income from the sale of surplus production - has increased substantially.

This experience suggests that when people assume the role as protagonists of their life this increases the want to work together for a more cooperative meaningful existence. In this context, diversity (cultural, professional, of gender, etc.) assumes the connotation of important resource to achieve better and durable results.

#### 4. Conclusions and proposals

The most important lesson that could be learned through the stated complex environment of the independent Crimea is that *“democracy cannot be confused with dictatorship of the majority over minorities; it must include the rights of minorities and protesters to exist and express themselves”* (E. Morin, 1999:58).

In this perspective, in order to obtain real developments referred to real people and respondent to concrete needs, it is crucial assessing ambitions and feelings of belonging of the society’s members.

As demonstrated by the reported UNDP experience, community involvement through social mobilisation can lead also to positive changes in attitude. Ensuring rights and enhancing capabilities, communities can be able to take stock of their own situation, identify their own needs, set their own priorities and decide what resources they can contribute towards the solution of their own problems. In this framework, diversity becomes a favourable opportunity to enrich the process of perspectives, opinions and issues. The active participation of all actors, users and other potential beneficiaries improves considerably the quality of results.

The methodical adoption and implementation of this type of measures could be a contribution to the stabilisation of the Crimean socio-political situation. It also could increase development processes capable of being more coherent with themselves and this context, rediscovering, consolidating and integrating the diverse collective identities that make up its social body.

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