

# EXPERIENCES OF BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS FOR ROMA PEOPLE

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*The article analyzes the relationship between NGO personnel and beneficiaries of five development projects in Roma communities in Romania, trying to assess opportunities and challenges for achieving beneficiary participation. The focus is on strategies of action and the structural differences in the positions of the two partners, which may lead to systematic tensions and unexpected frustrations for all participants in the project. The article is based on qualitative case-study research conducted in the years 2000 – 2003 in five Romanian localities.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

After 1990 the number of development projects in Roma communities in Romania has increased continually. A comprehensive research on this topic identified 519 organizations that have implemented 1013 projects between 1990 and 2000, 80% of which were done after 1997 (Anăstăsoaie & Tarnovski 2001, p. 181). Given the increasing social relevance of this type of practice, it is important to study its achievements and challenges.

The particular significance of studying development projects in Roma communities derives from the fact that they represent an experiment in building citizenship for Roma people, bridging the social distance between them and the non-Roma citizens and authorities.

**Table 1. Differences between the position of State policies and NGO projects in relation with the Roma population**

State policies	Civil society development projects
Perceived as unmediated People view the State as the financier and the implementer at the same time. The State may be generous or absent, but not treacherous.	Perceived as mediated People view the NGO's as attracting funds from external sources, generally from abroad, in order to implement their projects. Sometimes NGO's are believed to abuse these funds, changing their destination.
Stable Policies have certain continuity, and the public officials are usually employed for several years at least.	Unstable Projects often last for one year or less, and the presence of the project staff in the community may fluctuate greatly.
Distant, impersonal Public authorities maintain a considerable	Claiming closeness and personal relationships

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