



## **PICTURE STORY**

# **Capacity Building**

**May 2007**

# Capacity Building



Imagine that you are a group of 3 to 4 young people, with some relevant but still limited experience, sitting in a café in Tirana, Pristina or Skopje.

You feel that public policy – both by your own government and by outside organisations having an impact on your government – is not based on an adequate understanding of what is going on in your country. You decide that instead of complaining you want to do something about this.

You are, at the same time sufficiently uncertain yourself about where your society is going and what the reasons of possible policy failures are. You also know that you live in a divided and complex society, and that any policy analysis must be presented in a way that is compelling and credible to a very broad range of readers to be taken seriously.

All you have initially is no (or in the best case a rather small) budget to finance yourselves, one room, and a lap-top.

What do you do?

Since 2004 ESI has offered capacity building seminars for people interested in answering this question.

Our effort started in Macedonia and Kosovo. It has since expanded to eight countries, from the Adriatic to the Caspian Sea.



## Table of contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| What we do.....   | 4  |
| The origins.....  | 5  |
| The Socratic approach.....                                    | 6  |
| The first step – seminars.....                                | 7  |
| 2006 Tirana seminar.....                                      | 8  |
| Concepts and stories.....                                     | 10 |
| ...and after the seminar? .....                               | 11 |
| Kosovo's dynamic think tank - IKS.....                        | 12 |
| Fish, lake and village – REAKTOR research on lake Ohrid ..... | 14 |
| How to leverage influence.....                                | 15 |
| Challenging conventional wisdom .....                         | 16 |
| Our promise.....  | 17 |
| New horizons.....   | 18 |
| Donors .....  | 19 |

## What we do



Seminar in Tirana

ESI Capacity building has two objectives:

- To build local research capacity for empirical research and policy analysis. ESI policy analysts transfer research, analysis and presentation skills by working intensively with local analysts on joint reports and collaborating on joint outreach activities.
- To influence national debates on the direction of social and institutional change and to increase understanding of social trends in a given society among European policy makers, the media and the general public.

These skills can't be taught in a single seminar. It takes intense, joint collaboration over an extended period of time.

## The origins



Seminar in Tirana – Seminar in Sarajevo

Since 1999, ESI has expanded its focus and area of operation from its origins in Bosnia-Herzegovina to cover the whole of South Eastern Europe. In the summer of 2007, ESI has 13 staff working in eleven countries.

In 2002, ESI first engaged in 'internal capacity building' for a large research project undertaken in Bosnia (a DFID "governance assessment"), working with 8 young Bosnian researchers.

In 2003 and 2004, ESI began organizing seminars on its experience and methodology for researchers across the Balkans.

Since 2004, ESI has dedicated time and resources to encouraging the emergence of a new generation of think tanks in Southeastern Europe. This has one of ESI's core institutional objectives.

ESI's capacity building efforts have supported the development of a number of dynamic new think tanks in the Balkans:

- **IKS** in Pristina;
- **CRPM** in Skopje;
- **REAKTOR** in Skopje;
- **AGENDA** in Tirana; and
- **POPULARI** in Sarajevo

## The Socratic approach



Interview – presentation – research

Capacity building is a process of mutual learning.

Drafting a report to have maximum impact is a context-specific skill. It cannot be taught in the abstract, but needs to be jointly developed. The method and approach is necessarily Socratic: knowledge cannot be handed over ready-made, but has to be appropriated by the knower. That appropriation is only possible through a common search. Recognising the gaps in ones own knowledge is the beginning of this journey.

ESI analysts – in constant discussion with local partners – learn how to adapt to the specific conditions in the countries concerned.

### The first step – seminars



Seminar in Tirana – seminar in Berlin

In each country where ESI has undertaken capacity building, the starting point has been a 2-3 day initial seminar.

For this, a group of between 15 and 25 people are selected following an open announcement in newspapers and through local civil society organisations.

To provoke discussion and reaction, we use a dynamic teaching process that draws on ESI's own experience: 4 people sitting in a cafe in Sarajevo in summer 1999, wrestling with conceptual and practical problems:

- how to combine ambitious research agendas with tight budgets;
- how to produce research in politically divided societies that can gain broad credibility;
- how to have an impact simultaneously on external actors (international financial institutions and governments) and on domestic policy makers;
- how to organise a process of institutional learning that enables a policy group to build up a track record of analytical excellence as a team.

## 2006 Tirana seminar



Seminar in Tirana

To illustrate how a typical seminar is structured see below the agenda of a seminar held in Tirana in 2006:

### 1st day

- 11:00 Introduction: Impact - structure – values  
Reports: Stories – analysis - dissemination  
Examples from ESI research in Bosnia and Turkey
- 14:30 Developing a research plan – research  
Examples: analysing urban governance (Pristina) by ESI-IKS since 2005
- 16:30 How to obtain information in the field – how to present it  
ESI Macedonia reports on social and economic trends and public policy (analysing rural development)  
  
ESI research, reports and presentations of analysis in the divided town of Mitrovica and other controversial settings
- 18:00 Team-work and drafting final reports: experiences how to produce and work as a team on a product that is better than that which any one researcher could have produced.
- 21:00 Brainstorming: **What analytical stories need to be told about Albania?**



**2nd day**

- 9:30** Core concepts – how to understand social change:  
*Institutions – Institution Building – “getting to Denmark” - Europeanization –  
Development – regions that grow – regions people leave*
- 11:00 Potential research plans for Albania – working groups
- 15:00 Presentations by working groups of research plans
- 17:30 Conclusion - *Policy campaigns based on research*

## Concepts and stories



Gerald giving a presentation

The initial training paves the way for a period of intense collaboration.

Since **concepts** are the essential tools of social research and **stories** the way human beings communicate most effectively, we need to ask very basic questions: what are some of the core concepts, the best and most gripping books and the compelling stories to help make sense of developments in a given society?

- What are some of the techniques of communicating analysis effectively to reach a broader audience?
- How can policy analysis achieve real social impact in a country on the European periphery?
- How can interdisciplinary teams work effectively?
- How to progress from rich empirical research and concrete case studies to useful policy recommendations?

How to combine the descriptive and the prescriptive in a manner that avoids being seen as partisan?

Issues covered range from the concrete - research and interview techniques; reading between the lines of reports of international financial institutions; (re)drafting subchapters as a team effort – to the bigger conceptual picture: how to apply core concepts from the social sciences, without appearing too academic for a wider readership, in building up a consistent analytical framework?

**...and after the seminar?**



IKS office in Kosovo - Macedonia

The idea behind ESI capacity building is not long-distance advice or isolated seminars and workshops, but hands-on involvement in a joint research endeavour to meet a shared, ambitious objective. The only real learning is by doing.

Following each seminar, ESI offers to engage actively in a second phase of capacity building. This has involved ESI analysts working with local researchers following the seminars on further project ideas for a few months, to develop a joint research agenda.

We can do this for participants who are affiliated to existing research institutions and want to strengthen their research capacity, or for those who aspire to create something new.

### Kosovo's dynamic think tank - IKS



Rreze doing an interview in Cerrce (Kosovo) – historical map of Pristina

To illustrate how labour intensive capacity building is we can use the example of ESI capacity building in Kosovo with a new think-tank, IKS, since early 2005:

Following an initial seminar and the formation of a local research team a joint ambitious research agenda is defined in early 2005: to undertake a governance assessment of the (obviously badly governed) capital of Kosovo, Pristina.

Research begins: it involves collecting a large number of official documents, and dozens of interviews. It involves coming up with a draft outline of how to approach the issue of governance in Pristina: what in ESI parlance is called a *Storyboard*. Interviews are collected, analysed, discussed in the research team. The first collections of research, *ESI Material Collections*, are put together.

However, by the autumn of 2005 it emerges that the best way to tell the Pristina story and change perceptions and assumptions of policy makers and the wider community (and thus influence the wider public debate on governance) is to focus on specific sub-stories which need to be researched more: one is the story of the strategic urban plan 'Pristina 2020' and the effort by the local urban planners to manipulate data and information to engage in an expensive exercise of 'utopian planning'; a second is the difficulty of finding any information on the development of the city since 1945, and how this 'missing' identity might be related to current governance; and a third are current economic trends – internationalisation through the strong UN presence, deindustrialisation, and the remittance economy - and how they affect different parts of the city and different social groups.

On each of these subjects more interviews are made and more material is gathered. By late 2005 some 150 interviews have been made. There are now material collections on *Pristina – History and Identity*, and on *Pristina – Planning*. There are numerous drafts. Some very powerful conclusions are emerging.

At this stage the team makes the decision to launch the Pristina governance debate immediately with a short paper on what might appear at first to be a side issue, but is emblematic of the wider problems: the fate of cultural heritage protection in the city,

illustrated through the interaction (and failures) of four institutions: the municipal and national institutes for the protection of monuments, the national ministry of culture and the municipal department of urbanism.

This involves additional research and reading on cultural heritage protection policies in Europe, Council of Europe conventions, interviews with the foreign experts active in this field in Pristina and Kosovo, reading a new set of books and articles. The specific Pristina story is then told through one list lying in the institute for protection of monuments and the fate of the 21 legally protected buildings included on that list. A first paper is produced, and a presentation of initial findings is organised in the National Museum of Kosovo. It works: the story of the monuments triggers a wider debate on the legacy of "destroy the old, build the new" that has informed Pristina's development since the 1940s. It highlights the lack of enforcement of legislation and of any cooperation between institutions at different levels of government.

Spin-off products at this phase of the project are the first ever map of the historical centre of Pristina that IKS and ESI commissioned, showing all the protected monuments, as well as a folder for distribution in Kosovo's schools.

However, the larger objective – to provide an analysis of governance and trigger a broader debate on the future of the city – has not changed. Research continues intensively and by June 2006 IKS and ESI organise another event, this time with the mayor (who was surprised by the strong echo to the cultural heritage protection event) and the main urban planner, on urban planning and development in the city. A discussion paper is produced for the occasion (*'Planning Utopia'*) and widely disseminated. Media pick up the story; IKS and ESI analysts go on national TV to explain some of their conclusions from the research. Meetings are held with leading politicians at the national level as well.

Today, the Pristina research – as well as IKS as a new think-tank – is already well known. Kosovo media report that the international press picks up the discussion paper on Pristina. The World Bank disseminates the 'Planning Utopia' paper. New civic initiatives form in Pristina to work on a "My Pristina" campaign, together with IKS, taking both the cultural heritage and planning research as starting points for campaigns of civic activism. In the meantime IKS and ESI continue to work on the final, large report on *Missing Identity - Economy and Governance in Pristina today*.

Within the space of 18 months, IKS has emerged as one of the most dynamic, visible and credible policy analysis teams in Kosovo. What this concrete story illustrates is also that while the objective was clear from the start – discover what is going wrong in the governance of the capital and make an impact on the debate through a large well researched report – the concrete steps were adopted to research findings and informed by a strategic assessment of how to present these findings most effectively.

### **Fish, lake and village – REAKTOR research on lake Ohrid**



Andrej – Neda – Lake Ohrid

One intense research effort has been with REAKTOR from Skopje, a Macedonian think tank that emerged from our first capacity building efforts in 2004.

The REAKTOR team did detailed research on the historical village Pestani at Lake Ohrid. Though it remains a village, Pestani shares many of the new social problems of urban Ohrid, making it representative of the economic, social and environmental challenges facing the Ohrid region. The research offers a portrait of a changing society, and examines how effectively government is responding to those changes.

The report by REAKTOR in cooperation with ESI will be published soon.

## How to leverage influence



NZZ – Dani – The Guardian - FAZ

ESI has often found that appealing *simultaneously* to a national and an international audience is an effective influencing strategy. Much of our analysis has been written for external audiences – donors, international organisations, EU member states. But this is rarely enough to bring about real change. The challenge is to write products that can successfully challenge both national and international policy makers.

ESI has undertaken research since 1999 in a large number of different countries and territories: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Turkey, and Bulgaria. In Kosovo ESI was asked to set up and manage a unique Lessons Learned and Analysis Unit within the EU Pillar of UNMIK for three years, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina it carried out a Governance Assessment for DfID. Since 2004 it has also carried out research across Anatolia and established a reputation as a source of new and reliable information on Turkish society. Currently, ESI is working on a *New Economic Geography of South Eastern Europe*, a series of studies of local and regional change to help explain the big policy challenges across a complex region.

### **Challenging conventional wisdom**



Children in Kosovo – Besa (IKS)

ESI has developed a distinctive empirical methodology for the analysis of social and economic development issues. We have spent many years refining our case study approach. We try to build up as detailed an understanding as possible of a specific area of a country (a region, a municipality or even a village), a specific sector of the economy (agriculture, textile industry, etc.) or a policy issue (for example privatisation, urban planning or refugee return).

Detailed case studies help us to build an understanding of the complex realities and change processes, leading to new insights and challenging commonly held views. This approach requires the generation of new data through intensive field research. This may involve dozens, or sometimes hundreds, of interviews with political officials, staff of administrative institutions (both on central and local levels), businessmen, workers, farmers, teachers, journalists and representatives of foreign institutions.



## Our promise



Lake Ohrid – Ohrid seminar

Central to ESI capacity building efforts is the promise that ESI analysts will commit to working jointly with a local team on at least one major policy report, which should meet ESI's own standards of excellence. Such collaboration continues from inception and field research through to drafting, publication, dissemination and presentation.

During the project period, ESI will organise a series of training seminars and workshops on practical and conceptual issues: information management, interview techniques, narratives, outreach, effective website management and development, organisational development, fundraising and strategies for influencing policy debates, both nationally and internationally.

### **New horizons**



Baku – Tbilisi - Yerevan

In early 2007, ESI expanded its capacity building efforts. Spring 2007 has seen the third capacity building seminar in Bosnia in cooperation with POPULARI, as well as fact finding missions to Yerevan and Baku. Capacity building seminars took place in July in Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan. In autumn 2007, ESI researchers started joint research in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with local analysts who had participated in these seminars.

## Donors



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