

# Transfer of Governance Culture: A Case Study of Socio Cultural Barriers for Institutional Adaptation in Croatia

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*The paper discusses the results of the empirical research on cultural encounters between Croatian and EU public administrations. The research identifies several socio cultural barriers within the Croatian national administration that could be treated as governance culture deficit. The “deficit” has been detected through the “unpleasant surprise” of public officers coming from European countries through South Stability Pact Agreement (SSPA) and through descriptions of “conflicts” in the encounter reported by domestic respondents participating in the cooperation designed by SSPA. The deficit was found to be composed of three barriers: a) lack of vision or value disorientation; b) catatonic behaviour or irrational administration and c) “don’t rock the boat culture” or inertia syndrome. On the other hand two principal governance transfer “enhancers” were identified on the part of local administration: a) vertical mobility aspiration and b) historic (superior) business mission.*

*The discussion argues that two out of three governance deficits are path dependent and common to all post totalitarian societies. However, one deficit is labelled as “situational”, therefore country specific, as it is related to the “postponed accession” to the EU. The governance enhancers are explained as subjective categories related to the individual aspirations and career development. In conclusion it is suggested that hesitant integration perspective for Croatia fosters the petrification of post totalitarian liabilities in governance practice.*

**Key words:** CROATIA, GOVERNANCE CULTURE DEFICIT, INTEGRATION, EUROPEAN UNION, SOCIO CULTURAL CAPITAL, POLITICAL CAPITAL

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This analysis brings about a qualitative insight into the social circumstances and institutional spirit of governance bodies in a European transition country with a “postponed accession agenda”<sup>1</sup>. Even though part of a wider *consortium* study<sup>2</sup> conducted in Croatia in 2005, about the changes of governance culture occurring in the European accessing countries due to the “integration pressure”, the specificity of the

<sup>1</sup> A “postponed accession agenda” designates a political situation where integration represents a part of country’s domestic political process but is neither politically nor institutionally linked to the first (2004) round of Enlargement commonly referred to as the “Big Bang” nor to the second (2007) round of Enlargement, when Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU.

<sup>2</sup> This case study is a part of a wider, collaborative research project, financed through the EU Frame 6 programme under the name “Dioscuri”. The research was led jointly by Central European University from Budapest and Institut für die Wissenschaft vom Menschen from Vienna and carried out by 8 national research teams from: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania in 2003 – 2005 period.

case lays precisely with the “postponed accession” because it suggests a “chaotic” accommodation of post totalitarian institutional system to the standards of “acquis”. Even though the reasons for the “accession postponement” are not of direct interest for this analysis, it should be noted that authors define the postponement as a “political” stalemate produced by two simultaneous but historically substantially disparate missions of Croatia’s political elites: to create an independent nation<sup>3</sup> and to integrate post totalitarian society into the EU as soon as possible. Previously mentioned *consortium* study proposed a hypothesis that the interaction between different post totalitarian national administrations and EU “acquis” benchmarking agents would produce a number of governance culture hybrids in the new EU member states. Obviously, the Croatian team had to rewrite, a little bit, this original “big picture” *scenario* because EU institutional presence was rather low on intensity when the research officially started off in Croatia in 2005 due to the postponed accession agenda. As a matter of fact, Croatia applied for EU membership in February 2003 and in April 2004 the European Commission issued a positive opinion (‘avis’) that recommended the opening of accession negotiations. In June 2004 Croatia received, from the European Council, the status of a candidate country that launched the accession process<sup>4</sup>. The process was supposed to start on March 17, 2005 upon the appraisal of Croatian cooperation with the Haag’s International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Since it was estimated that Croatia has not met the criteria of the full cooperation with ICTY, the accession process had been slowed down later in the year. Therefore, EU integration pressure which would enhance the creation of mentioned “hybrids” was obviously, not strong enough at the time of the research to produce substantial changes of the inherited governance culture, a process already deeply under way in other “proto” integration Eastern European countries, where the consortium was about to start to look for the “hybrid” evidence.

As it was obvious, by the tools of mere deduction, that the “EU bred” governance hybrids were not about to be found in Croatia, the only possible thing to observe was governance culture of a mature “post totalitarian status” whose *catatonia* (Rogić, 2000) and socio – historic *semi modernity* (Županov, 2001) was additionally underpinned by strong “intervening variable” of war time governance features. Therefore, Croatian institutions were, at the time of the research, a rather unique “field sample”, within the consortium group, where a blend of historically outdated post totalitarian elites with a specific Yugoslav “self management” flair and of newly produced war time elites administered the country in a fully fledged process of transition, with privatization as a main internationally recommended regulation well under way.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Suite to a decade of political crisis in Yugoslavia, after the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1983, Croatia was recognized as an independent country on January 15 1992, after showing a fierce resistance to Serbian led Yugoslav invasion in 1991.

<sup>4</sup> After EC adopted its Opinion on Croatia’s Application for EU Membership (available online at: [http://europea.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations](http://europea.eu.int/comm/external_relations)).

<sup>5</sup> A milestone World Bank study published in 2002 under the name “*Transition – The First Ten Years, Analysis and Lessons for Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*”, IBRD/WB, Washington, D. C., shows that “privatization” was a central reform principle in 1990 – 2000 period in the transitional Europe and Former Soviet Union. For additional insight cf. Bishop, Kay, Mayer (1999).

In the meantime the research was successfully finished, while Croatia is today swiftly moving toward the EU accession. Therefore, the evidence displayed here can today be treaded as the “record of the past”. Hopefully, this evidence will help build the “integration case” for other nations on the European continent, currently left in their post totalitarian condition with no clear integration prospects which are, however, striving to rehabilitate their national identity and, at the same time, find their place in the “European dream” (Rifkin, 2004).

The paper is structured in six sections – the current one serving as an introduction. The second section provides the theoretical background of the research while the third explains research design and timing. The fourth section gives some observations related to the empirical research such as motives for choosing administrative career and evidence of cultural encounter described as pleasant/unpleasant surprises and shocks. The fifth section identifies the institutional and socio cultural deficit of Croatian administration. Finally, the sixth section summarises the main findings of the paper and displays conclusions.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It is today widely recognized that social capital is an important determinant of economic growth (Knack and Keefer, 1997) as well as of the quality of government performance (Putnam, 1993). As government performance and efficiency of public administration has feed-back effect on social and economic development, the quality of governance attracts a growing attention of analysts and researchers (Tavits, 2006). It is specially the case in the transition countries where “invisible” hand of market is distorted or simply not sufficiently developed to direct socio-economic progress adequately. In the context of decisive role of government the interplay among social capital, government performance and economic development is crucial. Social capital i.e. internal social and cultural coherence, norms, values and attitude that govern relations among people and institutions influence the behaviour of bureaucratic elites and government performance which, vice versa, shape social capital that determines the pace of socio-economic development.

The contemporary studies on social capital in Croatia are neither abundant nor systemized (Šalaj, 2007), the most significant contribution being provided by Štulhofer (2000) and Rimac and Štulhofer (2004). The mentioned authors based their research concept on a combination of dimensions such as inherited norms and values (path dependent process) and norms and values created through a “situational reaction” model by the transition process. The essence of situational reaction model lays in the presumption of negative public assessment of the privatization of previously state-owned companies. The negative image of privatization interprets the process as the abuse of political power and an excess of clientelism thus inducing negative situational reactions such as: widespread cynicism, opportunism and tendencies towards corruption. It is further argued that these situational reactions eventually suppress social capacity for change (Štulhofer, 2000; Rimac and Štulhofer, 2004). The grim shades of contemporary socio cultural capital is reinforced by the research revealing that 60% of citizens have “no” or “low” trust in public governance (Perko-Šeparović, 2006).

As Rogić (2000) and Županov (2001) argue that socio-historic legacy of “second Croatian modernization” (Rogić, 2000) are “semi-modernism” (Županov, 2001) and “paradoxical modernization” (Rogić, 2000) it is relatively easy to relate Croatian crony capitalism as described by Bičanić and Franičević (2003) to both (path dependant) social costs of totalitarian past as well as to situational reaction model described by Rimac and Štulhofer (2004). But whatever the analytical explanation of the problem – there is growing recognition that contemporary political elites in Croatia suffer from the low level of professionalism and a lack of elaborated EU accession strategy (Čengić et al., 2004). In addition Bađun (2004) has convincingly shown that public administration also lags behind considerably by all quality of governance indicators, particularly with respect to the rule of law which is potentially the greatest obstacle in Croatia’s accession to the EU and overall sustainable development. Finally, relevant studies conducted by international agencies (OECD, 2004) point out the rigid hierarchical structure and low responsiveness of service-oriented administrative culture in ministries and other administrative bodies (OECD, 2004). Therefore, it does not surprise that “structural reforms” remain key recommendation for improvement of the quality of governance in Croatia (Boromisa, 2004; Bađun, 2004; Perko-Šeparović, 2006). But how does one design structural reforms? It seems that the first step would be to identify barriers to the transfer of new governance culture. In order to gain insight into the substance of those hypothetical barriers the following research plan was proposed by Croatian team to the previously mentioned international consortium.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN, TIMING AND OBSTACLES

In order to collect empirical data on cultural encounters related to EU enlargement, two groups of respondents were targeted: a) short term experts and their national audience participating in the training of local government officials and b) long-term foreign experts and their national counterparts, operating in Croatia within the scope of CARDS<sup>6</sup> program. This methodological choice is based on the fact that both, short and long term experts were provided through the same institutional channel, the Stability Pact agreement and related CARDS program<sup>7</sup>. The CARDS programme served, in fact, as an essential channel for provision of the Community technical and financial assistance to Croatia in the process of integration and presents a first cultural encounter of the Croatian administration with the “western-style” of governance. Therefore, this program was the only logical frame where a “mirror interview” a previously adopted consortium instrument could be applied in carrying out the empirical research.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that this structural difference in the type of the encounter (short vs. long) revealed a behavioural finding which could be summed up in a simple conclusion: the higher the rank of the local official, the lower the willingness to participate in the research. However, this observation was not, as it will be shown in the further text, corroborated by the behaviour of local respondents who collaborated with long term experts on project implementation.

<sup>6</sup> Community Assistance for Reconstruction Development and Stabilization

<sup>7</sup> Country strategy paper for Croatia, 2002-2006, CARDS (available online at: [http://www.delhrv.ec.europa.eu/images/article/File/Strategija\\_EK\\_za\\_CARDS\\_za\\_RH\\_2002-2006.pdf](http://www.delhrv.ec.europa.eu/images/article/File/Strategija_EK_za_CARDS_za_RH_2002-2006.pdf))

One possible way to explain this ambiguous participation pattern is that the willingness to participate depended on the understanding of the political/normative obstacles to the accession of Croatia to the EU. Another way to explain it is that some respondents were Euro sceptics, unwilling to participate in anything related to EU integration/enlargement. First explanation suggests that high ranked locals who were, at the time of the research, bound to cooperate only on a short term basis, simply did not believe in the short term accession mission of the national administration and consequently saved their energy waiting for political climate change. Other explanation, which is far less probable, suggests that by the pure chance that the group of the respondents was to the larger extent Euro-sceptical.

On the other hand, those who had to collaborate with the long term EU experts and thus considered longer period for the accession, given the reality of the Stability pact accession pace, were more at ease and were willing to participate in the research for they considered it “useful”. But whatever the explanation for this bizarre “division of attitudes toward the research”, the observation was relevant. It subtly corroborated the main hypothesis that the “undefined” integration status of a country, in this very case – Croatia, affects the administrative culture and nature of encounters produced by the transfer of administrative knowledge.

The research was conducted over a period of three months starting from June 2005 to September 2005. Therefore, it captured attitudes about administrative culture and transfer of administrative knowledge, right before the beginning of the Accession negotiations for *Croatia*, on October 4, 2005. All in all 21 interviews were conducted of which 15 with the foreign short and long term experts and 6 with the local administrators.

In order to arrange the needed interviews the Ministry of European Integration (MEI), as a pivot institution in the process of Croatian integration in the EU and the principal coordinator of the CARDS programme as a whole, kindly provided the list of training programmes and contacts in order to select the short term consultants involved in training of domestic experts. It also provided the list of resident twining advisers, the foreign experts with permanent stay in Croatia during the implementation of so-called CARDS twining projects. They serve as the basic resource for recruitment of long-term experts since they stay in Croatia for at least a year and are more due to project implementation.

In addition, EC delegation was asked to provide several respondents since EC staff was the most familiar with the situation in Croatia and was expected to have long personal experience and qualified opinion about Croatian administration. Finally, the list of respondents looked as follows:

Foreign staff	Domestic staff
3 EC delegation members	4 Long term experts
6 Resident (long term) twining advisors	2 Ad hoc domestic administrators
6 Short term trainers	
<b>Total: 15 respondents</b>	<b>Total: 6 respondents</b>

The interviews were made with experts engaged in very different fields of reform process provided the CARDS programme. They ranged from civil society and prevention of corruption through judicial system, border (custom) management, and food safety to the state statistics, intellectual property rights, ecological standards and competition policies.

The interviews were of semi structured type thus having some common fixed sub topics, as follows:

- Carrier and professional background of respondents,
- Motives for coming to work in Croatia,
- Prior experience with Croatia and Croatian culture,
- Comparison of the institutional capacity of Croatia for integration in the EU assessed by the respondent in his/her particular field of work,
- Frustrations / pleasant surprises and expectations,
- Formulation of a mission and expected results upon the project finalization.

The same structure was applied for domestic experts adjusting the questions to their specific situation. For example, question on motives for coming to Croatia was substituted with motives to become an employee in public administration; frustration with the situation was explored by focus on their work inside public administration, etc.

Interestingly, the research did not capture the dramatic political circumstances of the beginning of negotiations, as most of the respondents visibly refrained from commenting on the political aspect of the situation. Therefore, the evidence provided here will not at all refer to the political problems underpinning the integration effort in Croatia. However, a frequent reference of the respondents to the political stalemate as the liability, for the administrative encounters, will clearly indicate the intensity of this contextual/situational burden for the process.

#### **4. OBSERVATION RESULTS**

##### **4.1. Foreign experts and their motives for coming to Croatia**

Both, short and long term foreign experts interviewed in the course of this research did not have particular expectation and they have not been especially familiar with the culture and customs in Croatia, prior to their coming to the country. Motives for their arrival are principally professional as they are driven by their expectation of personal career promotion i.e. references related to engagement in EC Delegation and international projects. They would accept the position in any other country inside or outside the EU that were “at stake” at the moment of their availability and that would accelerate their personal professional promotion. It was rather obvious that they did not have any strategic obligations toward the host society, for in case they had any, one would expect deeper insights in the countries’ specificities.

There is a major difference between short and long term experts. Most of the first ones come from the newly accessed countries like Slovenia and Hungary, while

long term experts were mainly selected from the “core” EU countries. Also, short term experts were not in any contact with the EC as they were “recruited” by consulting offices contracted by national ministries for foreign affairs to deliver assistance to Croatia – a procedure highly similar to the USAID practice of informative consulting for fee. On the other hand those experts who were bound to stay here longer, e.g. resident twinning advisors, perceived their job as a “mission” and were much more interested in accomplishing the task, not only in order to submit the positive report to the EC, but also to fulfil their assignment in assisting Croatian reform processes. Consequently, they were much more interested in understanding the host environment and much more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the local administration.

Regardless of the length of the stay or the origin of the foreign expert trainer, there was an overall impression that all the respondents were selected for their jobs in Croatia primarily due to their expertise in the respected field and professionalism, thus suggesting that the “enlargement” is, within the European Union, a highly respected administrative job which along with the status provides also gains in terms of salary or consulting fee. Also, it was observed that “enlargement” job mission demanded, from both short and long term “trainers”, higher levels of competencies as, beside the expertise, they had to have advanced linguistic and presentation skills coupled with a good deal of social psychology capacity.

As most of the trainers indeed did have such a profile, majority of them were quite open in their answers and expressed no restriction toward the recording of the conversation, but forbid public use without prior consent. Just a few were worried about the possible reaction of the EC Delegation and possible misuse of the interview, e.g. negative newspaper publicity. Consequently, only one respondent refused to take part in the project and one (a police resident expert trainer on a twinning project) declined the recording.

#### **4.2. Local experts and their motives to work on “integration”**

When it comes to local administrators who participated in the research two characteristics were quite obvious: a) most of them were women (5 out of 6) and b) all of them were highly qualified. Also, it is worth mentioning that none of the men participating in the short term training courses responded to the research solicitation. Interestingly all the men participating in those courses were higher ranked than women, even though women administrators represented visible majority in the audience. It was, therefore, obvious that “enlargement jobs” were, within the EU outsourced to competent and distinguished members of core (historic) European administration and young professionals often with extensive Western education history in newly accessed countries. On the other hand, in Croatia, “integration training programs” were delivered to competent but rather un-influential parts of public administration: women.

As far as their motives to do this job are concerned, they are far less personal and stunningly less lucrative than those of foreign experts as they are bound to assist the enlargement due to the integration political pressure and without any specific remuneration.

neration. Therefore, they do it either because of the hierarchical administrative order or because of the personal intrinsic motivation. This very fact again suggests that, at the time of the research, which was actually the time of opening and postponing the integration process, “accession” was perceived as a second rate administration business for no awards were allocated to those who were performing it within the public administration, even though it visibly demanded higher communication skills and high level of professional competences.

Opposite to the foreign experts who were paid quite well for working on enlargement process, those Croatians who were working on integration within the Stability Pact would usually work extra for the same amount of money. Therefore it is not surprising that such jobs were delegated to women. Obviously, administration decision makers rationally concluded that over motivated integration effort does not pay off as they were aware that their work ultimately did not matter as the right to access, in case of Croatia, did not depend on their performance, but on the fate of the “missing General”<sup>8</sup>.

In this context, with ambiguous political agenda ahead, the national administration found a way out of the trap by allocating the integration related work mostly to women in order to smoothly perform the pre-accession technical (expert) job. In this arrangement female assiduity would properly serve the process of post/modernization, while female hierarchy deficit would secure the inherited power distribution typical for administrative capacities of ex-Yugoslavia. The important thing to add here is that this specific human resource tactic was possible principally because an EU devised “Western Balkan” concept, resembled highly to the shapes of Yugoslavia, thus symbolically suggesting that political future of Croatia resembled its’ political past.

### 4.3. Evidence of the encounter

#### 4.3.1. Pleasant surprise

Almost all the interviewed foreigners claimed that they were quite surprised with the level of standard and living conditions stressing that these are completely in the range of any other EU “western” country (Exhibit 1), while some of them even got quite familiar with the country (Exhibit 2).

#### **Exhibit 1**

Well, with a country I have not been very surprised because I knew also before, but for sure the level comparing what we can imagine from abroad, generally speaking, is quite higher. The level of a way of living, let say everything, this is like, I do know, Slovenia, or countries on the north of Italy, no difference.

<sup>8</sup> We refer here to the fact that the International War Tribunal in Hague and its’ chief prosecutor Mrs. Carla del Ponte, had the capacity to link the prospects of integration with the fate of Mr Ante Gotovina a fugitive Croatian general.



**Exhibit 2**

I am nearly half Croatian ... I am going around like a rooster (as Croats do)... It is very nice atmosphere. I love Croatia because (...) here is a normal way of life... to have a coffee,... chatting ...I have friends and we meet each Saturday and Sunday in these small restaurants and we are talking about the politics and EU. It is very nice... this way a life.

It was not surprising that a lot of respondents emphasized the following characteristics: better quality of life in Zagreb than in their own cities due to less pressure, kind people, nice city, friendly atmosphere in restaurants, shops etc. The citizens of Zagreb were recognized as rather open, friendly and transparent.

When it comes to judging the professional side of the governance transfer encounter the positive experience is mainly limited to the short term experts since their experience is based mostly on the “situational impressions”. On the opposite, the long-term experts’ first encounter impressions are less positive since they are loaded by routine work and constant pressure of accomplishing the assigned tasks. The positive experience stemming out from the first and short encounter was shared also by local counterparts (Exhibit 3).

**Exhibit 3**

I: You are a part of the Croatian accession negotiating team participating in a cycle of training programmes in order to better prepare for accession negotiations. How do you feel about foreign trainers?

R: Ok. I think that the seminar I attended was very good and I think that trainers did their job very well but I would, in the future, like to see much more of very specific examples where we could see how a specific conflict situation was resolved, so that we could know how to react when problems with regard to negotiations pop up in the situation of screening and direct negotiating process. (...) even though this general thing was good as an introduction (...) I would like some more profound digging.

Obviously everybody in the short term programme was happy with this exchange, for they were able not only to communicate on the same level of expertise, but also to take a sort of comparative perspective and even critical positions with regard to specific level of expertise and specific relevance of the expertise for particular Croatian integration case.

However, this idyllic first perception tended, sometimes, to evolve in other direction, when longer experience in Croatia was acquired by foreign experts. Once they were faced with the real, day to day, life in national administration, some of them were rather negatively surprised even shocked with the fact that the projects they work on were treated, within the ministry management structure, not as the “Croatian” projects, but as “their” i.e. “alien” projects.

#### 4.3.2. *The unpleasant surprise and the shock*

Several respondents stressed that EU projects were not perceived from the Croatian side as something important for Croatian development. Instead, they were identified as being exclusively of interest for foreign consultants themselves therefore, by definition, unproductive and unnecessary in the host environment. As a consequence, foreign consultants were put in the situation to justify the value and purposes of the project after the project agreement was signed and project launched a procedure they commented as highly embarrassing and finally offensive.

##### **Exhibit 4**

(...) the new government comes and the assistant ministers who were supposed to start working with us (...) It takes some time to recognize that we are not here without invitation and we are not actually trying to make anything else but helping him to do what every minister has to do, reforming the sector. But at first, I would say, we were feeling like some “extra” job. Like I am aiming at something else then they are supposed to aim. Now, I think it is more like recognition that the tools are maybe different but the common goals we share...

There were certain situations where some of the respondents suffered the lack of essential working conditions as they were not provided even with the basic office and equipment.

##### **Exhibit 5**

(...) it would be impossible to work in my country like it is working here. For example, the project is supposed to start one year before, so we have one year of delay. When I come here I have no room, I have no equipment I have no telephone, nothing, nothing... So... The Ministry, our counterpart, tell me next week you will get the room...but nothing... I must go to the EC Delegation in Zagreb and told them that if I will not get the room and equipment I will go home. I can not work here. EC delegation made a little trouble and I finally got this room.

The foreign experts themselves often commented that such a situation could be assigned to the following factors: a) lack of organization capacity of the particular ministry from the technical point of view (the lower-level administrations was simply not told what to do), b) lack of decision making i.e. incapacity to choose relevant priorities and assign tasks.

None of the respondents linked the observed “organizational deficit” to political uncertainty of integration for Croatia due to the problems with Mr A. Gotovina and thw Hague Tribunal. However, it is quite hard to believe that the administration which managed the political will to acquire independence, a task demanding superior foreign relation abilities, would have such a hard time responding to integration invitation.

Therefore, some testimonies (Exhibit 6) point more to the “will to ignore” than to the “incapacity to cooperate”.

**Exhibit 6**

I think, it is a real problem for me that the Croatian side has a difficulty to understand fully the implications of signing the twinning contract. It means that they are not aware, or they have difficulty actually to find necessary resources, to give sufficient and effective inputs into the project. (...) It actually took a half of year to get the reaction, the statement that software should be developed internally. We are still suffering the insufficient allocation of these resources.

Obviously, low prioritization of the projects within the activities of the ministries was a principal tool of “administrative negligence” (Exhibit 7). On the other hand, the low priority of CARDS projects was in great contrast with the proclaimed national strategic goal of integration with the EU. Therefore, shortcomings in cooperation were obviously produced somewhere between high politics and public administration thus producing weak absorption capacity of the foreign technical assistance that had the negative feedback on the whole integration process.

**Exhibit 7**

At the beginning, for sure, I was frustrated. I could not find a real counterpart who is interested at all. (...) It was the main problem. Everybody thinks that it is my project.

So, at the end, just...I do not know, and this is frustrating, just to see how they on the higher level, think that they are doing for you. And it is not my interest, this is not my office (...) project can work only if I have an office. This first experience was a shock to my opinion. But I knew from the other projects that it is always the same situation. But I am always surprised with that. All the time, I hope that something will be better, but...

However, at this point, one has to wonder why would public administration irrationally produce obstacles for cooperation, if “integration” was a politically settled question, which produces upward mobility by default? On the contrary, in a limbo of political uncertainty, the administration could have million of reasons to refrain from cooperation. One of them could be to spare itself from an additional, underpaid job in the time when integration invitation was not politically clear enough.

Should one, at this point, want to sum up the evidence of the research, one would have to conclude that the overall ambience of the country as well as the socio economic performance of the country was highly appealing to the foreign experts on the enlargement mission in Croatia. Also, short term experts were in contact with highly competent and motivated local administrators and, therefore, undoubtedly positively surprised. Local administrators attending short trainings were also quite happy with

the trainings and were prepared not only to competently participate, but also to judge critically the kind of expert consultancy they were getting. So, for them, the encounter has been professionally interesting.

On the other hand, the long term experts were able to experience and “reveal” the underpinning “credo” of administrative culture, which was unknown to them previously and which was, for them, highly frustrating. They attributed obstacles they encountered to the incapacity to understand integration processes and policies. In essence, they complained about “low priority” of their projects which actually meant slow implementation and weak financing from the Croatian side. But, again, why would integration projects have a high priority in a country whose integration in the EU has the lowest priority in Central and Eastern Europe? It is, therefore, rational to suggest that mentioned inefficiencies are logical effect of ambiguous political process which did not send clear messages to all levels of administration. It also points out the conclusion that the linkage of integration prospects to the historical problems of the break up of Yugoslavia was not such a good idea!

## **5. DEFINING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS WITHIN CROATIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE PRE-ACCESSION PERIOD**

Bearing in mind the above statement which suggests that deficits in “cooperation on integration” stemmed out of blurred political context, a “content” analysis of the Croatian administration culture “deficits” was of interest in this section. The deficits are elaborated according to the “key words” which appeared in the respective interviews and were perceived in the analysis as relevant. All in all, three structural elements of “incapacity” were revealed as pertinent in the interviews and are elaborated as separate topics below.

### **5.1. Lack of vision**

A significant number of foreign respondents suggest that “*vision*” i.e. “*political leadership*” is clearly missing in the process causing low absorption capacities of administration. Vision is, to use the very words of one of the respondents, crucial for the creation of synergies. As witnessed by a foreign (Exhibit 8) as well as a domestic female respondent (Exhibit 9), a lack of vision at the level of political elites produces inefficiencies and chaos slowing down the integration process.

#### **Exhibit 8**

On the general level, definitely, the lack of vision, incapacity for identification of the existing resources, the efficient usage of them and (...) on the other side, it is obvious that, strong individuals are important or that any other interest, professional or political which generates synergy necessary for implementation of the project. On the highest levels. This is the level of political elite...

**Exhibit 9**

I: Does this mean that you think that standards that come through these training seminars suggest that our system of governance is not well prepared?

R: No. That is not the case. I think that problems are going to stem out from political level because, they are not aware at all what is out there waiting for them. Particularly at the local level where the implementation is actually going to occur. That is going to be an unimaginable fight of different authorities and we are very “green” in all of that.

For some respondents lack of vision is a principal reason for the passivity of their Croatian counterparts. When trying to explain this passive position of Croatian administrators, the long term experts usually pointed to two problems: a) local administrators are humiliated by the authority of foreigners, due to the absence of domestic leadership b) many experienced civil servants in the ministries are out of the encounter transfer as they do not master the common integration tool – English. Thus, strategic management of projects is done by persons who, due to the adequate language competences, act as “cultural brokers” even though they do not really have necessary experience and what is more important: expertise. Therefore, “lack of vision” implies many additional problems ranging from low understanding of purpose of the project to “low mobilization” of necessary stakeholders (Exhibit 10).

**Exhibit 10**

It was commonly perceived that this Ministry was not prepared for participating in such a programme. There was a lack of vision that the education should be closely connected to labour market. From the beginning the resistance of the “establishment” existed due to the lack of knowledge in general (...) and the guild-type professional interest and lobbies. All in all, there was readiness on a general level, in contacts with the EC but in reality there were not so much interest. It caused the second negative effect, that project implementation was primarily led by EU and project was continued mainly due to the enthusiasm of a few people...

(...) Generally speaking Ministry was interested in the project but lacking the management abilities to mobilize all the stakeholders like the Institute (...), social partners, Chambers of Commerce, etc (...) Definitely, yes, on this level of deputy ministers, they do not succeed to mobilize qualified people.

Some domestic respondents think that the absorption capacity is rather weak as evidenced by the percentage of contracted projects in relation to the total resources committed<sup>9</sup>. Although many Croatian politicians find the excuse in the lack of qualified

<sup>9</sup> For example, in 2002 only 33,7 % of total committed resources were contracted. Cf. Amended Action Program, Croatia, 2004, p. 3 available online at: [http://www.delhrv.cec.eu.int/images/article/File/ap\\_2004\\_hr\\_ammend\\_en.pdf](http://www.delhrv.cec.eu.int/images/article/File/ap_2004_hr_ammend_en.pdf)

staff in a country of 4, 5 million people, domestic respondents seem to have a different attitude (Exhibit 11).

#### **Exhibit 11**

Generally speaking, the absorption is weak. It is evidenced in practice by the number of contracted and carried projects. The extremely good examples are Slovenia and Estonia... Many times, the comments of our politicians were mainly complaining that they can not find sufficient number of young and expert personnel. Exactly those countries proved that it is possible. Slovenia with 2, 5 million of inhabitants or Estonia with e.g. 2 million, etc. I think that everything what Slovenia has done, we are able to do the same. We share the same context, the same historical heritage... but we are not organized in such a good way. (...)

### **5.2. Catatonic management**

Next to the “lack of vision” several respondents identify old fashioned structure and rigid hierarchy as the critical impediments for serious reform. Apparently, rigid hierarchy is sweeping out collegial type of working, horizontal cooperation and above all the delegation of the tasks. Any kind of the delegation of tasks and responsibility hardly exists in the Croatian administration as the command chain is always top down. Officers are just waiting for their superiors to give out commands and directives.

#### **Exhibit 12**

The structure of any ministry, and my Ministry is not specific..., they have very, very heavy structure. There are a lot of people on the same level and then still some important issues are made by the minister, or state secretary, or assistant ministers, who are really not able to approach any direct direction.

The difference (between my country and Croatia) is the lack of delegation. In most of the countries same people are not doing the same things. I select for me as good assistance as I can rely on him to do what I told him to do without checking everything. If he is making the mistakes, it is my responsibility.

The one is the general weakness of the public administration that is inert and sluggish by itself. It concerns the way of hiring the personnel that is highly formalized and inadequate, then the ways of promoting and awarding of the personnel that are very limited and thus non-motivational and the way of firing people that is very limited. It means that practically there is no way for getting off unproductive personnel. The possibilities for both awarding and punishment are very small, almost impossible. The salaries are determined in advance and they are small so it is practically impossible to get some good experts in the field...

The unwillingness to delegate generates, internally, the effect of chaos, while it externally creates the image of a catatonic administration unable to react in the real time to the needs of citizens. No wonder it is not easy to understand, for foreigners, who is responsible and for what and whom exactly to ask for information as, basically, nobody has responsibility. The problem is typical for the administrative apparatus which delegates tasks but not responsibilities. Croatian administration is overloaded by permanent checking and controlling of lower level administrative decisions. In addition, everything must go in many copies, from the lowest to the highest level of the ministries thus, keeping the staff busy. This situation resembles an engine working at a high speed but not moving at all.

### Exhibit 13

In Croatia, however, administration is a little bit non-organized. You never know who is responsible and for what. People do not easily give the information I need and I do not know whom exactly to ask.

I would say that the distribution of the tasks in this country, within the Ministry (...) is very, very old fashioned (...) Same things have been done hundreds times. (...) People are concentrated on the minor details making themselves very busy. They do not see that what is making them very busy is a lack of planning, lack of organizing and old-fashioned way of working. How many copies are made? How many people are engaged? Why do you want to make you so busy with something that is absolutely useless? In functioning of the Ministry level it makes a lot of waste.

Catatonic management naturally rejects rational methods such as: time allocation, planning, carrying out the goals, re-scheduling and adapting, turn out to be unnecessary even irrational. Therefore, it often happens that activities start “ad hoc”, creating pressure where everybody is under stress. That is why keeping deadlines in Croatian administration is often a mission impossible. Diachronic insight and contextual understanding allow the conclusion that a problem is “path dependent” as it stems out from the administrative tradition formulated by totalitarian “culture” which preferred control over allocation. This subject has been of huge interest for sociology and has been theoretically labelled as “catatonic or irrational bureaucratization” (Rogić, 1998, 2000; Županov, 2001).

Theoretically, sociologists see roots of catatonic (irrational) bureaucratization as a historic effect of slow process of the first (periferial) and the second (totalitarian) modernizations in Croatia (Rogić, 2000) thus embedded in a semi-modern social structure of Croatian society (Županov, 2001). According to Rogić (1998, 2000) Croatia has inherited the Yugoslav “catatonic” bureaucratization generated in the period of the second modernization, spanning from 1945 to 1990. The main task of bureaucracy in that period was to supervise the socialistic regime and keep the values of socialistic attainments achieved during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Its’ rationalism is limited to the copying of the totalitarian practice from the army, policy, political party or similar sub-systems to the public administrative apparatus in order to keep control and secure administra-

tive efficiency. Therefore, the rational culture of Western bureaucracy had an Eastern administrative counterpart: totalitarian practice and control mechanism. The second important feature of the catatonic bureaucracy refers to its' proclaimed fight for workers' rights in order to create a welfare state based on totalitarian system. The social security, health system etc. that was created during the socialism provided the bureaucracy with needed social legitimacy. The self-management system that was inaugurated during the second modernization provided, the bureaucracy, on the other side, with the political power and political legitimacy. Self-management system provides the catatonic bureaucracy, with an image of anti-bureaucratic revolution and anti-totalitarian movements. The cohabitation of the class of workers – self-managers and bureaucratic elite was the perfect one since it enabled them to make rents and profit from their social and political position. The first made their rent of their social benefits such as workers' job protection and social privileges while the latter make the rent from their political positions as their personal sinecures.

After Croatia gained independence, in 1991, the paradoxical modernization features did not disappear. They only mutated into new social forms where stability of social structure has been assured by the mutual tolerance of the newly established political elites i.e. “regulators” and newly established businessman i.e. “entrepreneurs”. Social stability based on mutual tolerance of above mentioned agents was historically and ideologically underpinned by the peaceful pace of democratization in Eastern Europe and unquestioned agenda of privatization as the key reform tool for “marketization” of centrally planned economies. Market economy being identified as a core scenario of modernization/post modernization of post-totalitarian societies the long lasting cohabitation was assured leaving the problems of the quality of “governance” aside.

However, where transition was coupled with the EU enlargement, integration acted as an intervening variable as it represented a normative top down pressure for upgraded administrative capacity. Consequently, where integration was postponed or even not planned at all, as actually happened in Croatia, path dependant totalitarian regulation forms persisted forming a social stalemate labelled by sociologists as “wild” or “crony” capitalism” (Županov, 2002; Bičanić, Franičević, 2003). Therefore, integration can be described as a powerful tool of reforming catatonic heritage in Eastern Europe. However, it came to Croatia with a substantial delay due to the Stability pact “containment arrangement” designed by the international decision makers as a diplomatic tool to manage the belligerent dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia.

### **5.3. “Don't rock the boat” administrative credo**

It is not surprising therefore that catatonic management encourages the blossom of a special “credo” embedded in all segments of public administration: political elites, middle management and lower level administration: the “don't rock the boat” corporate administrative culture. Basic values underpinning this culture are derived from a diachronically corroborated experience that it is far more opportune for a local administrator to support inertia than to take responsibilities in a visionless process.



In such a climate the only winners were “business rent seekers” and their political counterparts – “political rent-seeker”. It allows them to pursue various types of gray merchandises in order to keep their privileges (Exhibit 14). Administration’s middle managers supporting political rent seekers perceive their positions as a sort of sinecure, thus adding another structural level of support to the “don’t rock the boat” culture. Finally, the vast majority of low-level administration is afraid of collateral damages, for they can be unintentional victims of visionless changes. Therefore, the interest of all the members of public administration, regardless the position, is converging to the same attitude of maintaining the *status quo*. Agitations, “stirring the muddy waters” are not welcome by anyone underlying the domination of “don’t rock the boat culture” culture.

#### **Exhibit 14**

Besides this general unwillingness of the public administration for changes there are several sub-segments of the lower public officers who perceive their job as a sinecure to the highest level of politicians e.g. deputy minister. (...) then the political merchandise would be impossible, and the satisfaction of the political hunger for different position will not be met. (...) Lack of will, lack of the general management capacities, since it is obvious that modern government administration growingly requests not only professionalism and experts but also managers. On the other side, there is unwillingness to “rock the boat” since all these actions always bear some victims, collateral damages.

The “don’t rock the boat” culture ultimately implies weak motivation on subjective level. The research suggests that 4 particular and widely used policies induce this dangerous administrative “credo”.

The voluntarism of “hire and fire” policy in public administration was found to be the first one for hardly anybody could be fired because of incompetence or indolence (Exhibit 15). A rather clear testimony of one of the respondents describe well the observed “inability to fire” stalemate.

#### **Exhibit 15**

There are many highly expert persons who have neither interest nor talent for the leading positions. However, they are, due to different occasions, found on the various management positions that are practically impossible to release. To be replaced is a tragedy for them from both the sides: honour and money. Simply, they can not accept the fact that somebody else could be better on this position in spite of his/her expertise. ... but on this middle management cadre (heads of the departments) replacement is almost impossible, except in the really excess situations. Practically, it is not possible to fire anybody who has reached certain position.

Moving to another level of administration, a different voluntary policy again underpins the dangerous credo: irresponsible firing of competent people. This problem is related to a situation where a qualified person is fired for political reasons (e.g. frequ-

ent changes in government administration after elections and related dismissal of the personnel), fractional fights or personnel clashes. Dismissing for political reasons are the most frequent and the most significant de-motivational factor for middle-management, since hardworking and agile officials are actually punished for their efforts and enthusiasm when they are identified as political opposition. The political hand, sometimes, goes too deep when government changes thus producing administrative instability. This is how the motivation for agile work and change is substituted with the motivation for conformism. “Conformism usually pays off”, said one of the respondents.

The next policy contributing to the “do not rock the boat” credo is hyper reduced promotion of young experts to the responsible (leading) position in middle administration. (Exhibit 16)

#### **Exhibit 16**

For me the system of salaries’ grades, when you after the 10 years of work could reach the level of head of the department is not very convenient. It would be better that the position at the ministries is determined by expertise and capabilities. It is not so much important the number of years at work, e.g. 15 of 25 but the competences. If somebody has certain degree of knowledge and capacities, and enthusiasm, then the possibility for such a person to be promoted should exist. Promotion should be connected to the degree of responsibilities.

Finally, the fourth policy of promoting “baby doll” faces without expertise complements the previous three. It stems out of, basically, political fascination with young and marketable people who are taking responsibilities they cannot cope with precisely due to the lack of experience and expertise. This visible non merit principle shakes the very foundations of any rational administrating thus adding the cherry on the top of ineffective administration.

#### **5.4. Personal values as integration “enhancers”**

Together with ample evidence on liabilities to transfer the “acquis” inspired administrative culture in Croatia, the research has discovered evidences of explicit “drivers” for cooperative work on integration and these are: a) additional education i.e. opportunities to acquire new knowledge and professional know how and b) sense of historic duty connected to pride and honourable public service, a factor that is rather important but neglected.

#### **5.5. Vertical mobility aspiration**

Interviews have clearly showed that work in public administration on integration issues are very positively perceived by lower ranked young educated people. They see it first and foremost as a possibility for additional education and gaining a privileged experience much different from their routine administrative work. In addition, there is a creative challenge connected to the novelty of the projects performed by public administration through CARDS, World Bank and other channels of cooperati-

on. Finally, there is a personal pride of own contribution to the development of the country, self-esteem and building the self-confidence through international relations, a quite important element in a country with short independence history. A testimony of a young public servant (Exhibit 17) subtly suggests that the age variable works as an “integration incentive”.

#### **Exhibit 17**

... and training like foreign language, training, expert journeys, etc. It is a big advantage here. Therefore, in spite of all the shortcomings, somebody who is interested in own improvements is able to receive it here.

I am very satisfied because I love my job very much and I am very happy with the circumstances I am working in. (...) In essence, all these jobs contribute to your personal experience; they make you rich in this sense. My contribution to the Ministry is that I am working really all 8 hours a day and that I am completely devoted to this job. I am satisfied with the fact that I am “building in” my work, my knowledge, that’s it.

... because I have the opportunity, as well as my colleagues to attain different training and seminars, usually called “capacity building”, negotiation techniques with (...). When you are preparing yourself for such a seminar you are broadening your experience, and that is this active part of broadening knowledge and personal upgrading.

#### **5.6. Historic (superior) business mission**

Coupled with education, historic perspective was revealed to be another driver for proactive attitude for collaboration in the accession mission within the target group of domestic civil servants. In their perception work on integration is a unique, historic event, which by that very fact commands extra assiduity and greater responsibility. Therefore, an insight provided by a young female Croatian administrator who was working on highly expert financial issues suggests that uniqueness of the process actually serves for some people as intrinsic motivation (Exhibit 18).

#### **Exhibit 18**

I: Is there anything which you could qualify as fear, or do you feel at ease with regard to your part of job in negotiating process?

R: With regard to accession negotiations my emotions are mostly positive. I think others feel like that, too. However, everything depends on how seriously our team approaches this problem. I personally understand this very seriously and I think I have enough of competence to do it properly. So, my expectations are positive. Besides, I find the whole thing very interesting and I am very glad to be chosen into the working group. I think this is something that happens once in a life time... Because Croatia does not enter every day into the European Union, this is something that happens to us, while our kids, will not have a chance to go through something like that...

I: Could I conclude that you are aware of the historic dimension of the whole thing?

R: I am very aware.

I: Do you feel some greater responsibility because of that?

R: Absolutely.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The discussion presented above showed that research identified three cultural barriers to be the core of “structural deficit” in Croatian governance culture. It was suggested that: a) lack of vision b) catatonic behaviour and c) “don’t rock the boat culture” form an obstruction which can seriously endanger country’s integration capacity. The authors, basically, connected the country specific “lack of vision” problem to the outside “containment” strategy chosen by global political stake holders as a solution to the break up of Yugoslavia. On the other hand it was suggested that second barrier labelled as “catatonic management” represented a path dependant socio cultural feature pervasive in posttotalitarian societies and persisting in Croatia due to the “postponed accession agenda”. Finally, the “don’t rock the boat” culture with it’s salient characteristic: repulsion of meritocratic allocation of rewards, has been found to be the third stiff barrier for smooth institutional adaptation to the EU enlargement.

Judging from the overall discussion presented above, it is allowed to conclude that integration policies will only be successful if political will to access/absorb is clear and non-hesitant on both sides of the process. This would eliminate the “lack of vision” problem, which represents a serious barrier and a pervasive problem for the effective accession/enlargement in any possible political case. The analysis also showed that Croatian administration has big potential in the strata of young socially responsible people who perceive integration as an “equal opportunity” process, for upward professional mobility. They will be the ones to bring their creative inputs into the process thus transforming top down enlarging procedures into grass rooted development incentive. They should be promoted to the department chiefs in administration thus allocating them the responsibility to execute projects. As for the catatonic management it should be resolved by clear-cut “fire and hire policy” where merit for promoting public interest in integration efforts should be benchmark for the allocation of professional rewards.

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## **TRANSFER KULTURE UPRAVLJANJA: ANALIZA SLUČAJA KULTURNIH BARIJERA ZA INSTITUCIONALNU ADAPTACIJU U HRVATSKOJ**

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*Rad diskutira empirijska istraživanja kulturnih odnosa službenika Republike Hrvatske i EU. Istraživanje identificira nekoliko socio-kulturnih prepreka u hrvatskoj administraciji koje treba smatrati kulturnim deficitom upravljanja. "Deficit" je detektiran kroz "neprijazna iznenađenja" u Sporazumu (South Stability Pact Agreement SSPA) i "sukobima" s kojim su se susreli službenici iz zemalja EU u svojim odnosima s hrvatskim službenicima koji su bili uključeni u SSPA. "Deficit" se odražava kroz tri prepreke: a) manjak vizije ili vrijednosna dezorijentacija, b) katatoničko ponašanje ili iracionalna administracija i c) "ne talasaj" kultura ili sindrom inercije. S druge strane lokalna administracija identificirala je dva "pojačala" transfera: a) aspiracija vertikalnoj mobilnosti i b) historijska (superiorna) gospodarska misija.*

*U diskusiji se argumentira da dva od tri deficita upravljanja ovise o putu i zajednički su svim post-totalitarnim društvima. Međutim, jedan deficit je označen kao "situacijski", prema tome specifičan za svaku zemlju i povezan je s zakašnjelom akcesijom EU. Pojačala upravljanja objašnjena su kao subjektivne kategorije povezane s individualnim aspiracijama i razvojem karijera. U zaključku je predloženo da oklijevajuće perspektive integracije Republike Hrvatske potiču petrifikaciju post-totalitarnih nedostataka u praksi upravljanja*

**ključne riječi:** HRVATSKA, DEFICIT KULTURE UPRAVLJANJA, INTEGRACIJA, EUROPSKA UNIJA, SOCIOKULTURNI KAPITAL, POLITIČKI KAPITAL