ECA Sustainable Cities Initiative
Social Sustainability Assessment

DURRËS
City Synthesis Report

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This City Synthesis Report for Durrës presents the results of a Social Sustainability Assessment carried out by the Institute for International Urban Development (www.i2ud.org), Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development (www.co-plan.org). A summary of findings of the desk and field research that included focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and a participatory workshop is also available in a separate Durrës City Note. This assessment is part of the World Bank’s Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Sustainable Cities Initiative and the WB-Austria Urban Partnership Program (UPP) for Strengthening Local Governments in South-Eastern-Europe, funded by the UPP and managed by the ECA Social Development and ECA Urban Development departments and the World Bank Institute. For more information, please refer to the ECA Sustainable Cities Website: http://bit.ly/XWFMCG and www.seecities.eu. The analysis, results, and views expressed in this paper are those of the authors alone and do not represent the position of the World Bank or any of its member countries.

Team

Co-Plan Institute for Habitat Development

Dritan Shutina
Co-Project Manager

Aida Ciro
Strategic Communication and Research Expert

Darina Kokona
Participatory Approaches Specialist

Institute for International Urban Development

John Driscoll
Co-Project Manager

Carolina Morgan
Research Associate
DURRËS

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Introduction

As part of the WB- Austria Partnership Program for Strengthening Local Governments in South-Eastern-Europe countries and the ECA Sustainable Cities Initiatives the World Bank Social Development unit in ECA has developed a Social Sustainability Assessment framework that takes into consideration two dimensions of socially sustainable and inclusive urban development:

- **Social Accountability and Participation** to increase accountability in the delivery of services and programmes and empower urban marginalized and vulnerable groups to participate in their cities’ development; and

- Proactively addressing the challenges of **Marginalization** to identify the needs of socially excluded groups and associated inequalities.

The ECA SCI Social Sustainability Assessment seeks to **contribute to increased knowledge and awareness of social accountability** among local stakeholders including civil society, government officials and marginalized urban residents; and to **strengthen integrity in public service delivery** in five selected cities in the ECA region by **increasing the demand for good governance, social accountability and civic participation**.

The Institute for International Urban Development (I2UD) in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development in Tirana have assembled a team of local experts to carry out the research and fieldwork in their respective cities, namely Durrës (Albania), Prishtina (Kosovo), Skopje (FYROM), Banja Luka and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Phase 1 of the project, completed in September 2012, resulted in detailed profiles of each of the five the cities covering demographic, social, physical, economic, cultural, institutional and political issues. The results of this research are summarized in **Section 1**. The full report is available upon request. During this initial stage, the city teams also identified vulnerable groups to be the focus of the second phase of the Assessment. This selection was made on the basis of official information obtained from institutions responsible for the provision of various public services at a local level, findings from research studies made by international and national organizations, as well as other relevant documents (laws, provisions, local development strategies, etc.) and representatives from marginalized and vulnerable communities and NGOS consulted during the inception phase.

Phase 2 involved extensive fieldwork and consultation with community members and other stakeholders. Each city team carried out six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and eight In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). The FGDs were held with each vulnerable group, with men and women in different rooms for part of the discussion. The teams also conducted FGDs with NGOs. The questionnaires are available in an annex as a separate document. Focus group participants were recruited through a public call advertised via mailing lists and social networks and cooperation with local grassroots NGOs that work with the identified vulnerable communities. Each potential participant was asked to provide background information; this allowed the focus group organizer to bring together representative groups to account for specific characteristics such as age, economic status and municipality where they live. The unemployed and the low-income
employed FG participants were given a small stipend to cover transportation costs. The stipend varied from 1.5-5 EUR depending on the distance the participant had to travel.

In-Depth Interviews were carried out with at least two representatives of three of the following groups of stakeholders: the local government, the central government, the business sector, and the NGO sector. The selection of the interviewees has been based on personal background of the interviewee (gender, ethnic identity, living and work location, etc), and professional background (employment history, civic engagement, etc.)

Section 2 provides a summary overview of the issues raised during the FGDs and IDIs in Durrës. The summary is organized according to the three themes covered during the FGDs:
- Social inclusion in public services;
- Current levels of social accountability and participation; and
- Opportunities and constraints for social accountability and participation.

For Phase 3, a Participatory Scenario Development (PSD) Workshop was held in Durrës on December 13, 2012. The objectives of the PSD workshop were to:
- Raise awareness of the results of the previous two phases;
- Provide recommendations for the local government authorities, the wider civil society and intermediaries, i.e. NGOs, CBOs; and
- Map out solutions to reinforce socially sustainable city development and integrity in public services.

The workshop brought together stakeholders from multiple sectors and engaged them in identifying locally relevant pathways of autonomous and planned change (improvements) in the context of social accountability, sustainability and good governance.

The participants were encouraged to envision a future scenario for the introduction of various social accountability and social inclusion mechanisms. As a result, stakeholders developed a 'sense of ownership’ for the scenarios. Particular focus was placed on the use of ICT tools for drafting socially inclusive accountability initiatives. Section 3 builds on the scenarios agreed on by the workshop participants, as well as their recommended detailed actions for implementation, and suggests three key interventions to set the City of Durres on a Socially Accountable path.

Key considerations are also outlined in section 3.4 regarding a number of issues and reflections from the PSD workshop that should be considered when designing and planning the proposed scenarios. A regional workshop will take place in Skopje, Macedonia in mid-March 2013 during which the five cities that were the subject of this Assessment will present and discuss with each other the results of the workshop and the proposed next steps.
1. City Profile

1.1. General city profile

The city of Durrës is undoubtedly regarded as the prime maritime gateway to Albania (similarly for Kosovo and Macedonia) and as a municipality ranks second in size following Tirana, the capital of Albania. As such, Durrës is an important economic and industrial urban centre that has a rich historical and cultural heritage. In terms of connectivity, the city enjoys a favourable positioning at the intersection of national roads, connecting the northern region of Albania to the south, as well as serving as a point of access to the Adriatic Sea for the inland regions of Kosovo and Macedonia. From a regional perspective, Durrës is found in a strategic intersection for the region, with the development of the Corridor VIII, that connects Durrës to the Black Sea, via Macedonia and Bulgaria, and also with the latest construction of the Durrës – Morinë axis, a major government investment that will help connect Albania to Kosovo through a modern highway in comparatively shorter travelling time.\(^1\)

From an administrative division perspective, the wider Durrës region is one of a total of 12 Albanian regions. The region includes two districts, namely the district of Durrës and that of Kruja. The district of Durrës in itself consists of four municipalities and six communes. For the purposes of this analysis, the municipality of Durrës, which covers the larger area of the region, will constitute the focal point of our research.

Based on current figures provided by the Civil Registry Office, the registered population in the municipality is approximately 203,943 inhabitants, or 61,177 families\(^2\). The official spoken and written language is Albanian. The most significant minority groups are the Roma and Egyptian people living in this city with 1101 inhabitants or 183 families, which are located in the former industrial area named “NISH-Tulla” (former state enterprise manufacturing bricks).

The most significant factors to have contributed to the shaping of the demographic landscape of the municipality of Durrës, is the Albania-wide massive emigration of the early 1990s, especially among young adults and families moving to the neighbouring countries and rapid internal migration from rural areas. The difficult economic and social situation for rural families and individuals, together with limited opportunities for employment in rural areas, drove this rural-to-urban migration in Albania. In the case of Durrës, significant migration flows into the city, both in formal and informal areas, lead to the establishment of numerous informal settlement areas, namely: Këneta, Spitallë, and Porto-Romano.

The city, similarly to the wider region, is characterised by a high population growth and is considered relatively young by European standards, with a median age of 34\(^3\).

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\(^1\) Source of information: Agenda Institute and Municipality of Durres, SWOT report, 2008

\(^2\) Source information: Municipality of Durres, Civil Registry office, March 2012

\(^3\) The median age for Albania is 28.9, based on INSTAT data.
1.2. Legislative framework on Social Inclusion

In preparation for Albania's candidature for membership in the EU, a series of strategies have been designed and approved by the Council Ministers, including the National Strategy for Development and Integration (2007), and The Social Inclusion Strategy (2008). The Social Inclusion Strategy, approved on January 2008 by the Council of Ministers, is one of the most important government policy documents and also an imperative strategic document in Albania’s path towards integration to the European Community.

This strategy is an important milestone in the social policy arena and a very important step towards integrated, preventive and active social policies. It frames Albania’s investment and commitment to widening social inclusion instead of the struggle against social exclusion. In this framework, Social Inclusion is considered as one of the priorities of the current government, with poverty reduction as its main focus, which will be ensured not only through economic development. It focuses on poverty and social exclusion risks that remain even after the onset of economic growth. As a crosscutting strategy, it is fully consistent with the underlying sector strategies and in particular those policies and institutional arrangements described in these strategies that aim to assist vulnerable individuals, families and groups in the community so that they are able to operate on their own, to be self-sustaining and to have the same rights as other members of society.

The decentralization process in Albania is still ongoing and aligning local and central government strategies, programs and financing of services is an incomplete process that represents a challenge for the local authorities when developing programs to address social accountability. As per current legislation in Albania, vulnerable groups are defined as follows:

- Children at risk
- Roma/Egyptian Communities
- People with disabilities
- Elderly People
- Gender inequality victims
- Domestic violence victims

Similarly, as defined by the current legislation and confirmed by municipal sources, vulnerable groups in the city of Durrës comprise of: unemployed, street children, women, the elderly, informal settlers, Roma and Egyptian community. They are primarily concentrated in the areas of Këneta, Porto-Romano, Spittalë and Nish-Tulla (marked in the map).

Based on such provisions, the municipality priorities (which were also a substantial part of the current Mayor’s promise during the election campaign of 2011) are: (1) Poverty reduction; (2) A reduction in the number of homeless; (3) Expanding the spectrum of public services available to the vulnerable groups, and (4) Increasing employment prospects for the vulnerable groups.

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5 ibid.
6 (House of Europe Study, 2012: 42)
Figure 1: Informal Settlements in Durrës

Source: Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development
Based on the Regional Employment Office data, the active working force for 2011 in the city of Durrës accounted for 63,165 individuals. By the end of 2011, based on official statistics, the number of jobseekers in the city of Durrës amounted to 6,131 of which 56.6% were female. Based on the same figures, it becomes evident that the age-group most affected by unemployment is that of 45 and above, which make up for over 40% of the overall total. Considering that these figures are based on official records only, which are a reflection of the people who have registered at the Regional Employment Office, it is likely that the unemployment rate is higher than the reported figures.

Unfortunately, there are no official figures on current levels of poverty and extreme poverty; an outdated statistics from the Strategic Plan for Local Economic Development for the city of Durrës 2007-2015, defines poverty at a level of 22%.

As far as vulnerable group representation is concerned however, the Albanian political system does not offer any particular provisions. By law, membership in the municipal council requires affiliation to a political party, through which the election process is made possible. Under the current municipal council structure however, it has been possible to have two representatives (one representative from each main political force, Socialist Party and the Democratic Party) from the vulnerable groups located in the region no.6 of the city, otherwise referred to Këneta, or New Durrës.

Municipal council meetings are open to the general public and the media; sources within the municipality confirm that whilst citizens are free to attend/watch the proceedings, they tend to participate only in cases of issues of great interest to them, such as housing. The meetings of the Municipal Council are monitored, and can be viewed as video online by the public in the official municipal site:

http://www.infocip.org/al/?page_id=271

All municipal council decisions taken since 2007 have been made electronically available by the Center for Public Information Issues, and its local coordinating office: The office of civic transparency. This center believes that the citizens of Durrës ought to know what decisions are being taken on their behalf. Citizens with internet access can access the database at any time, and free of charge.

In addition, the municipality publishes important data concerning municipal services, citizens, businesses in annual publication ‘Buletini’, which is available for download from the municipal website www.Durrës.gov.al, although outdated versions are a regular occurrence.

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7 Regional Employment office in the municipality of Durrës, 2011 Report
1.3. Institutional challenges

The effectiveness of the decentralization process has a strong political dimension as the situation in Durrës demonstrates. Following the local elections in May 2011, the political friction that has existed between the local and central government persisted: the municipality of Durrës is led by the opposition force, the Socialist Party, whilst the Municipal Council is predominantly represented by the leading majority, the Democratic Party. This friction has led to the frequent postponement or cancellation of the municipal council meetings, and delays in decision making fundamental to the development of the city in all aspects: infrastructural, economic, social, educational among others. A case in point is that of the Municipal Budget for 2011; as a result of such political disputes, the approval of the budget for 2011 was postponed from March to September, 2011, undermining the implementation of a number of active, and planned projects.

The impact of political disputes reportedly brought to a halt the activity of the Territorial Planning Council, which was inevitably reflected in reduced revenues for the municipality. The mayor of the municipality of Durrës, Mr. Vangjush Dako, estimated that lack of compromise between these two institutions at the local level had cost the city a loss of 70% in revenues, from construction permits and infrastructure tax. Also affected were the implementation of a number of infrastructure projects, such the building a road parallel to the port to alleviate traffic congestion.

Additionally, infrastructure and urban projects, which make for a considerable part of the municipal budget expenditure, have unfortunately been poorly implemented and failed to last longer than 3-4 years, leading to the need for repeated investment. Such was the case of a main city street, “Rruga Tregtare”, which was paved with expensive tiles, costing the municipality 760 mil ALL, later to be substituted by simple road paving.

Monitoring and performance measurement of municipal service provision does not constitute a regular practice per se; rather it is an ad hoc process as and when required by specific projects in which the municipality is involved. Businesses and/or citizens are surveyed on a project basis, or alternatively, through various NGOs actively operating in the city of Durrës. The results of the surveys are then made available to the municipality to be analyzed and to be taken into account in the formulation of the coming year’s budget.

1.4. ICT vis-à-vis social accountability

The municipality has introduced the use of two ‘Info-points’ in locations that are easily accessible by the public, namely one outside the municipal building, and another within the premises of a shopping mall in the city center. In addition, the municipality of Durrës has been running a One-stop-shop practice since 2004. This unit operates full time five days a week within the municipal administration building and provides citizens with information concerning municipal services, business services, application forms and procedures and complaints.

Another example of ICT tools/instruments adopted by the municipality of Durrës is the use of the e-government /oracle system. The e-government platform enables improved storage and access of documents on an institutional level. In addition, from a public service provision

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8 The first 100 days of governance – OSFA Publication, 2012
perspective, the e-government platform is expected to significantly improve the citizen complaint procedure and its management. The municipality is also planning, as part of its e-government platform, to build an integrated web-center portal for the integration of GIS and open a call center. Although not very time-specific, the municipality is optimistic that, as part of a smart-cities initiative, the e-government platform will: facilitate municipal service provision to both citizens and businesses; enable the utilization of multiple communication and access channels such as e-kiosks, call centers, etc.; enable real time access and communication with foreign agencies; provide a better view of the citizen’s profile, needs, demands; provide real time access to citizens’ complaints; and enable improved management of personal data.

1.5. Public service provision

Most of the population of Durrës Municipality is registered in the civil registry office according to requirements and provisions by law. Yet there are problems related to the registration of the residents of informal areas and the Roma population. This is an Albania-wide issue and not isolated to Durrës. In addition to the civil registration, the informal settlements such as Spitalla, Porto Romano, and Këneta, present a challenge in terms of promoting cohesive urban development and the management of services—this is largely influenced by the need to resolve land tenure questions. The de facto land tenure dating back to the early 1990s became a modus-operandi as new laws were introduced (in 2004 and 2006) to legalize informal land holdings. While differing in approach, the laws represented an acknowledgement by the political parties, landowners, NGOs, and other interested parties that formalizing and regularizing the extensive informal settlements in Albania would bring benefits to the economy and society at large. The challenge for practitioners and officials in shaping future approaches will continue to be the “mismatch between the revised structures and laws, on paper, and functions and practice on the ground” (World Bank, Tirana, 2006).

Regarding the provision of health services in Durrës, although there has been a positive development in the sector regarding the introduction of the Health Insurance Scheme and the modernization of the city hospital, the sector remains problematic. Although comparatively high at the country level, the health indicators for the Durrës region have experienced a declining trend. The main challenges are related to unequal access to health services particularly in informal settlements, the lack of medical personnel, and the persistent practices/occurrences of bribery, which in themselves are exclusive for groups unable to pay.

Water supply remains a problem for the whole district; the daily water supply is limited to 1-2 hours. This figure is even lower in the areas of Këneta, Spitalla, and Porto Romano where most families lack access to water supply within the premises or vicinity to their homes. Similarly, the sewage system poses a challenge for the local government to manage and a hazard for the citizens particularly of a health, safety and environmental nature. The current system discharges sewages and rainwater into the sea, without prior treatment, seriously endangering the environment and tourism development prospects.

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9 World Bank Report, 2000
2. Summary of Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews

Team led by Aida Ciro, Co-PLAN

The Durrës city team held six focus group discussions among the following groups:

1. Youth (15-25)
2. The Elderly
3. The unemployed (Including Roma)
4. Employed low-income
5. Employed middle-income
6. Civil Society representatives (NGOs)

The discussions were held separately for men and women, with the exception of the civil society representatives (which was held together) for reasons that were particular to this group.10

2.1. Social Inclusion Vis-à-vis Service Provision

The results from the focus group discussions generally confirmed the findings from the desk research report. There were however many cases in all six groups when the gravity of the situation vis-à-vis service provision, communication, transparency and participation emerged much more clearly. It must be noted that, by and large, the perception of the community in relation to the focal points of discussion were predominantly negative at worst, and average at best. Interestingly, despite feelings of wide-spread institutional neglect, lack of dialogue, discontent at service quality, and skepticism vis-à-vis the municipal planning and spending practices, respondents seemed very willing to establish a communication channel with the municipality, and react to incentives that would promote active participation and information exchange.

All respondents in the unemployed group relied on occasional and informal employment that was often limited to a few weeks with the possibility extending to 2-3 months. This puts them in a position where they are working for below minimum wage and without social insurance. The majority of the respondents, both men and women, did not benefit from the Economic Aid Fund because they are from families that settled informally in the city, namely in Spitallë, Porto-Romano, Plazhi and the area formerly referred to as Kënete, and thus are not legally eligible for economic aid because:

1. They moved to the city after March 1, 1991, and failed to prove that they had a work contract in the city in which they moved; or
2. Owned land in the villages from where they came.

When asked about access and quality of services in their city, the majority of the respondents in all groups reported that their satisfaction with service provision varied between very low and average, depending on the nature of their vulnerability, issues with accessibility to services as

10 Civil Society representatives in Durres do not necessarily come in equal numbers between men and women; the latter dominated the group. Also, most importantly, based on information we received prior to the meeting, we learnt that NGOs in Durres saw this as an opportunity to come together and see past previous divisions among them, in order to initiate a dialogue on two levels: a dialogue between themselves, and a dialogue between them and the municipality. A tangible output and additional details will be provided further in the report.
basic as water supply\textsuperscript{11}, adequate infrastructure, safe and affordable transport, schooling facilities, child care, health centers etc. People living in Porto Romano are supplied with drinkable water only twice a week, while the sewerage system is reported as being in very poor condition. Limited public transport, poor access to schools and medical care are unanimously listed as less efficient in the areas of Porto Romano, Nish Tulla and Spitalla compared to city center and surrounding areas. In general, women considered water supply, sewage, waste collection and medical services essential due to the fact that they are more likely to engage with care activities in the house than men. In this view they expressed more concerns related to lack of kindergarten and primary schools, while men were concerned with public transport facilities, legalization and reimbursement of land procedures in cases of expropriation for public use.

Water contamination was reported as a key issue that could impact the health of children and the population at large. There are also additional concerns regarding contamination from: waste disposal and incineration; and the spread of chemical liquids and gases close to the Porto Romano neighborhood that are causing a health hazard for the entire community.

Employment opportunities are reported very limited. Respondents are facing serious difficulties in maintaining a job or finding a new one. Low-income families cannot afford professional training courses to increase their skills and meet the market needs.

In summary, it can be concluded that some of the most prevalent problems addressed during the discussions are as follows:

- For the unemployed, low-income employed and the elderly: the lack of sufficient or any income at all, resulting in poverty. In most cases, these families rely on very basic staples with low nutritional values that their limited income allows. As a result of malnutrition, children are very prone to contracting various diseases.
- For the unemployed, low-income employed, and youth: water supply limited to 90-120 minutes once every 3 days, with most families having to carry it from long distances using barrels to their homes. In fact the majority of the participants explained how they had to plan their day/week around the water supply schedule. In a humorous way, amidst desperation, they even told how people ‘cleared’ their agendas certain days of the week because it was ‘water day’.
- For the unemployed and low-income employed respondents: Porto-Romano and Spitalla residents reported limited access to health centers due to long distances and doctors being available only a certain part of the day. Due to lack of income, a number of school-age children had dropped out. Their parents could not afford nutrition, clothing, textbooks and stationary, for their children. Families that had managed to keep their children in school were faced with the challenge of affording highly priced textbooks, and meeting informal costs incurred as a result of the school’s failure to meet such costs itself, i.e. school premises cleaning, security etc.
- Parents among these respondents (unemployed and low-income employed) also addressed the issue of childcare with having restricted or no access to such facilities.

\textsuperscript{11} The service of water supply for the city of Durrës (and Tirana) unlike the other administrative units in Albania, is a central government competence/provision, although efforts have been made to pass on to a local government level. A financial dispute concerning the Directory of Water-supply, Sewage and Sanitation System, between the central government and the local government in Durres makes it all the more unclear to whom citizens should address their complaints concerning this issue.
• For the elderly, youth, unemployed, low-income employed: Lack of affordable transport to the schools and back, as well as transport to the city, for those who lived in any of the informal settlements. Monthly tickets are reported as almost impossible to buy in the official selling points; the majority are supplied directly to the black market, which increases its price from 600ALL to 900ALL (for children), and from 900ALL to 1200ALL (for adults). Families with 2-to-3 children reported that they couldn’t afford such costs and had to take their children out of school.

• For the unemployed, low-income, and partly the elderly: The majority of the respondents did not pay any of the local taxes due to lack of income. As a result, a number of participants reported the Power Supply Companies had penalized them by cutting their power supply.

• For the middle-income employed respondents, the elderly, youth: Lack of traffic lights across the city, or any traffic signs particularly intended for pedestrian safety, such as disappearance of zebra crossings.

• For all groups: Lack of green spaces, cultural and entertainment alternatives including cinemas and public sports facilities. Respondents (particularly women and the elderly) appeared upset by the fact that in order to *enjoy* a public space in the city, they have to pay as the majority of these spaces are used for the establishment of bars/coffee shops and restaurants, thus limiting their *free of charge* choices.

• For all groups: Lack of lighting particularly in areas that were not classified as central, which led to a feeling of unsafe streets.

*Figure 1: Elderly Male and Female Respondents*

*Figure 2: Low-income Male and Female Respondents*
Spatial definition of marginalized groups
As previously anticipated, a number of groups related location to at least two or more aspects of vulnerability, hence offering a spatial definition of vulnerability. Respondents from the informal settlements--ish-Kënetë, Porto-Romano and Spitallë--associated their lack of basic services, and
social inclusion to their informality. Because of the unplanned and massive population of such areas, stretching beyond what was regarded as the city prior to the 1990s; this process of rapid informal development was not preceded or followed by investments in infrastructure in order to integrate such parts with the existing system. Hence, acute problems with water supply, sewerage, waste management, child care, schooling, transportation and the intangible aspects of social inclusion were problems closely related and predominantly identified with the areas of: ish-Kënet, Porto-Romano, and Spittalë.

In terms of affordability of services and discontent with the level of information and communication with the municipal officials, it was hard to map out particular areas of the city, as this was a widely-shared concern, such as by the elderly, the employed (both low and middle-income) the NGOs and the youth.

2.2. Existing Social Accountability Levels

2.2.1. Views on current state of affairs at the local level
The focus group respondents reported a general lack of trust and an almost institutionalized practice of neglecting any requests, or complaints filed through the official channel; be it either in writing or through face-to-face meetings with the officials. The majority of the respondents perceived governmental services as not efficient, and government officials as unwilling to respond and unmotivated. They mentioned that the only time when the authorities went to visit them, and seemed to be interested in listening to their problems was during election times, when they were also promised tangible and feasible solutions to all of their problems, including water supply, transport, waste management, schooling, employment prospects, etc. They highlighted the fact that nothing had changed despite the electoral promises and the growing need for immediate action vis-à-vis the aforementioned issues. This approach, and other similar episodes shared by the respondents, had led to informal channels of dealing with the municipal officials, which inevitably require networking, informal lobbying, and intermediaries. Most importantly, there is no documentation or official tracking of any such practices.

In some cases, particularly among the unemployed group, a number of respondents reported cases of prejudice and ill treatment because of their status.

When asked about their sources of information and communication, the majority of the youth listed television and Internet as their main sources and mobile phones as their preferred and most common means of communication. In terms of communication vis-à-vis the municipality of Durrës, the students’ perception of the authorities is that they are distant and detached from citizens’ worries and concerns. Incidentally, this view was further confirmed by the Youth Parliament members in 2012, when they were left with no actual premises where to gather and from where to operate, despite several official requests addressed to the municipality. The respondents viewed this lack of cooperation and follow-up procedures from the municipal authorities as a factor that has contributed to the increasing apathy of Durrës citizens. In addition, they recalled a number of occurrences when they had approached the Mayor and other municipal authorities regarding the lack of sports, cultural and entertaining centers in the city for which they had yet to receive any response or witness any tangible changes.
Regarding transparency of decision-making, most respondents felt that it was very poor as decision-making is confined to within the ‘municipal walls’. A number of NGO representatives reported having tried on several occasions to attend council meetings and pose questions on the presented budget, to no avail, leaving them puzzled as to how decisions were taken.

In addition, in cases where services are administered at a local level yet decision-making concerning the policies and financing are done at the central level, citizens felt powerless in that they felt stuck in the gap between local and central government shared responsibilities. An example is that of social aid: the allowance is 3200 lek/month/family and is not sufficient to cover the basic needs of a family. As social aid (amount/rate) is approved at the central level, citizens have no access to complaints procedures or requests for revising the rate. The same happens within the education system, childcare, and health care.

2.2.2. **Methods for obtaining information about public services**
What can be generalized across the respondents’ comments from all groups is that, when it comes to obtaining information concerning services, they prefer direct contact with the people in charge, broadcast and print media and word-of-mouth.

The Municipality has established a weekly reception day, when citizens can meet the Mayor and report their problems, although low-income respondents declare to have limited access. The majority of respondents did not know the head of the administrative unit they lived in. All respondents noted the lack of persons to represent their interests apart from one or two Non Profit Organisations operating in the area.

It was also noted that, information and communication obtained through meetings with respective public officials was often too vague or general. In most cases, specific information that related to housing, economic aid, benefits on tariff and taxes exemptions was missing.

Documentation was reported as difficult to access and unaffordable for low-income families. Application forms for social aid are not accessible to them and not free. Applicants coming from low-income families have to pay for them although they are constrained by financial limitations. Legal information was also reported as very poor, and an understanding of legal or institutional practices or procedures to be followed, (i.e. procedures for the legalization process) was reported as insufficient by most respondents. In addition, since the self-declaration process for land regularization was completed, no progress has been made related to the legalization process. Respondents claimed having no further information and communication by authorities on what future steps to take. Respondents perceived local authorities as inefficient in this regard.

Homeless respondents were unaware of their rights, and how to obtain the status of homeless so to benefit from social housing schemes, as procedures are complicated and limited information is provided. Furthermore, documentation requirements involve money and time spent in administrative offices. For this, they claimed they needed practical and simple guidance on how to access to information and improve the situation related to basic service provision.

Respondents from the NGO sector, when asked about their most preferred sources of information, the majority of respondents listed networking using personal contacts, Internet, and
broadcast media. It should be noted that all respondents agreed that based on the Albanian context, and because of recurrent practices to date, direct contact was regarded as the most effective way to obtain information. This was particularly relevant in the case of municipal authorities, who were described as slow or non-responsive to official requests for information, despite a number of legislative provisions clearly establishing the rights and procedures for the right to information and the right to receiving an official response from government authorities and institutions. A number of respondents reported the municipal authorities would receive them, when approached, but would not follow-up with any of their promises, which had led to a loss of trust, and the inclination to perceive a significant degree of unwillingness to share information and lack transparency.

As far as the municipal website is concerned, the majority of the respondents assumed the municipality would have a website, but they had never visited it. Very few respondents confirmed having navigated the website occasionally, but did not find any reasons to go back to it, as they thought it was too narrative, lacked interactivity, and primarily dealt with the activities of the mayor. All respondents concluded that, in the cases when the municipality undertook a positive step to adopt ICT in its various forms, this enterprise lacked substance and promotion. The fact that the municipal website is primarily a one-way communication instrument - the municipality addressing the citizens - the respondents felt this was just another fad the municipality would have to adopt to look good.

When asked about the use of e-kiosks, and the use of the municipality publications, i.e. Buletini, the respondents again revealed they had not heard of any of them, and named lack of promotion as one of the main faults on the municipal side, as well as apathy on the citizens’ side.

Most participants voiced their concerns with citizen apathy as instrumental to the lack active citizenship and participation in decision-making and institutional accountability. It was concluded that this situation creates a vicious circle of a lack of oversight for the municipality and citizen apathy. They confirmed that the same was applicable for the case of the marginalized groups in the city.

2.2.3. Methods for placing questions or complaints about services
When the respondents were asked if they had ever filed a complaint at the municipality, the majority responded they had, either individually or in a group, depending on the nature of the subject. They reported they communicated in writing using official channels to complain to the authorities. From the discussions emerged a widely-shared view that complaints were almost never tended to, despite legislative provisions in the Code of Administrative Procedures for replies to official requests/complaints.

There was a wide-spread feeling that municipal officials were not respecting basic legislative provisions. In the group of middle-income employed persons, the respondents reported that they were certain the municipality had received their official complaint sent by recorded mail. Instead of addressing their complaint, the municipality officials had disclosed the names of the complainers to the party at the center of the complaint, triggering additional conflict.

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2.3. Opportunities and Constraints for Social Accountability

2.3.1. Perception/ Awareness/ participation in Social Accountability activities
Respondents reported that a more effective participatory approach was needed. At present, the majority of FGD participants highlighted the need to have the local community organized and present requests and complaints in a more structured way. ‘The local Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) should focus their work on how to best represent our interests’ - respondents said, ‘as they have the knowledge, the contacts and the experience’. They added that, by being organized or represented by an NGO, their interests and demands had a better chance to make it to the mayor’s desk, and better still to the respective departments for their ultimate solution. Failure to keep promises and not addressing problems has resulted in the lack of trust among residents. None of respondents had ever participated in any decision making process at the local level for example, participatory budgeting or strategy making). A good number of respondents from the unemployed, low-income employed and the elderly groups were not familiar with their rights in terms of participating in such activities.

2.3.2. Perceived obstacles to participation in decision making
Lack of proper information and the low level of community representation and organization were perceived as obstacles to participation in decision-making. Citizen commissions at the local level should be more inclusive. Representation of public interest especially for social vulnerable groups is lacking or is very fragmented.

2.3.3. Suggestions to improve Social Accountability
When asked how to improve SA tools and increase participation in SA activities, all respondents agreed that the head of the administrative units should organize meetings at the neighborhood level. Their offices should be open and accessible to provide information and to serve as a mediator between the local community and the municipality. Respondents claimed that these offices were usually closed and not functional. Information should be made public and visible, and face-to-face meetings should be organized to understand and verify the problems first-hand.

The participants also suggested that better coordination between local authorities and other public institutions is required. In most cases people are sent from one office to another generating confusion in regards to what information or procedures should be addressed and where; this results in time consuming bureaucratic practices.

Respondents stated that a stronger dialogue among citizens and the government should be established. Local authorities should enforce informative procedures that are accessible and easy to understand for low-income families. Community meetings and participatory approach to prioritize public interventions are proposed to take place at the neighborhood level. Citizens’ scorecards could be applicable in this regard.

The use of local TV, informative newsletters and public newsstands were reported as possible ways to be informed; Internet facilities were seen as less likely given that ICT infrastructure and skills are low.
2.4. In-Depth Interviews

Local Government Officials
1. Mr. Zyber Hyqi – Specialist at the Employment Center/Office at the Municipality of Durrës
2. Mr. Sokol Kokomani – Head of the Development Policies Unit - Municipality of Durrës
3. Ms. Ina Xhakoni – Head of the Project Management Unit - Municipality of Durrës

Central Government Officials
4. Ms. Blerina Zoto Tepelena – Head of Roma Decade Unit – Ministry of labour, social issues and equal chances, Tirana, Albania

Private Businesses Representative
6. Ms. Mimoza Xhelilaj – Manager of Fly Bar, most popular bar in Durrës (3 years)
7. Mr. Maliq Mullai – Manager & Owner of the biggest marble processing and selling firm in Durrës, Oneda sh.p.k. (15 years)

Civil Society Representatives
8. Mrs. Bajana Çeveli – Executive Director of ‘Women with Social Problems’, Durrës

When asked about the level of access to services and current standards, the interviewees had differing views. Governmental officials, both central and local, highlighted the fact that service provision has improved over the years, which is clearly noticeable in the fact that ‘we have been voted in office again’ – as one local government official put it.

Private sector representatives who are affected by services both as citizens and employers were less positive in this regard. They shared examples of failures to provide water supply, particularly during the peak tourist season, in which case they had to cater for themselves through alternative ways, which resulted in increased costs.

The majority of respondents agreed that informal development at a territorial level had contributed to the spatial marginalization of certain newly established areas of the city. The rapid pace of rural to urban migration to the city found the authorities unprepared in terms of service provision. All respondents agreed that the affordability of services represented a problem. There is also an acknowledgement that the intent and actions of strategies, legislation and policies have at times failed to materialize. Attributable factors include poor communication, poor information and almost non-existent standards and indicators to facilitate performance measurement.

The example of the Roma community was used to explain how at the central government level, the case of social inclusion of the Roma community had been incorporated into various sectoral strategies. Local government on the other hand, as part of the decentralization reform, had the competence to allocate part of the budget for addressing such problems, e.g. housing, infrastructure, etc. Despite the legal framework, no significant, tangible solutions had been offered to the Roma community. Lack of communication between the local government and the community (Roma), as well as lack of information among the Roma about their rights and possibilities to benefit from current provisions, had led to the current situation.
When asked about the level of communication and information, the view of local government officials was the most positive: they gave examples of municipality efforts, projects and practices intended to facilitate communication with the citizens and the exchange of information between the two parties. They did not have information, however, on how such practices (e-kiosk, one-stop shop, website) had improved the level of communication with citizens or the exchange of information between the two, for they did not know how many citizens used them and how useful these methods proved to be. The majority of the focus group respondents were not aware of any such practices, hence had not relied on them as mediums of communication or information.

As for communication, information and transparency at an institutional level, the majority of the respondents suggested that there was significant room for improvement considering that the legislative framework was very clear in terms of matters of information and transparency. There was a widely shared view among the interviewees, with the exception of the local government officials, that there are municipal officials and employees who view citizen engagement in a negative light and as a disruption to decision-making or daily activities. When asked about participatory and social accountability practices, the private sector representatives and the civil society explained that they were aware of their right to engage in public hearings and consultations in order to participate in decision-making. They also noted that on several occasions, when they had tried to actively participate by attending meetings and asking questions, for example in the case of the annual budget presentation, their views had not been taken into account.

A number of interviewees suggested that in order for social accountability and participatory processes to really take off in the municipality of Durrës as well as other Albanian cities, the tackling of current issues would have to occur on a number of levels:

1. Municipal officials would have to work on improving current mechanisms of communication and information sharing with citizens by making them fully operational and promoting awareness among citizens to increase their use.
2. Municipal officials would have to change the approach of working with the vulnerable groups, by being the ones to go to them, instead of waiting to hear from them if they make it to the municipality to complain and request services they have the right to receive by law.
3. Civil society organizations should enhance their role as intermediaries in representing the interests of the vulnerable groups and assisting the local government level in increasing its outreach to such groups.
4. People themselves should fulfill their civic duties by exercising their rights, being regularly informed, participating in public hearings/consultative meetings if and when informed and being more persistent at requesting more transparency at an institutional level.
5. New mechanisms should be set in place, in addition to the existing ones to bridge the communication gap between the municipality and the community it serves. Practical examples such as weekly newsletters, visible public news-stands in key public spaces, short text messaging system to massively inform citizens in the event of public hearings or consultative meetings being held, a more informative and substantial local newspaper, a better networking system with the schools, public institutions and private...
establishments to ensure smooth, effective information and communication channels, and a more interactive website widening the spectrum of services available online.

6. Set in place standards and indicators and regular monitoring and evaluation practices vis-à-vis service provision, and intangible issues such as level of satisfaction regarding communication, information, transparency, accountability, agility, interactivity, etc.

7. Invest in enhancing the availability of up-to-date, reliable data, accessible by citizens, upon which various forms of open government data incentives can develop for increased social accountability.

8. Both the central and the local government should work on clear, effective mechanisms of information exchange and feedback/complaints from the citizens for services that are administered by the local government, although the policies and finances are determined by the central government, i.e. education, child care provision, health care, etc.
3. Scenario Development Workshop Outcomes and Recommendations

The Participatory Scenario Development Workshop for the city of Durrës, was conceptualized and organized as a joint event between Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development and the Municipality of the City of Durrës. The choice for this partnership was strategic; given that the Municipality is currently in the process of reviewing their Strategic Planning for Local Economic Development of the city, we tried to engage them from the start, in order to nurture some sense of ownership and responsibility to any of the project outcomes to follow, including the scenarios.

The event, which was held on December 13, 2012 in the premises of the Cultural Center of the city, gathered 60 participants representing local government institutions including the municipality, citizens of various professions and interests, and civil society representatives including NGOs and CBOs. The fact that the city of Durrës is home to a state-owned university, ‘Aleksandër Mojsiu’, was reflected in the invitations, ensuring therefore a significant number of attendees.

Through the opening speech, the deputy-mayor, Mr. Adrian Çela highlighted the municipality’s willingness and commitment to matters pertaining to social accountability, and touched on a number of ICT incentives adopted and implemented by the city to this end, that were described in the phase 1 City Profile Report (Section 1).

The workshop agenda included a number of presentations covering emerging findings of the social assessment for Durrës, related social accountability aspects and the use of ICT; these were further elaborated through a number of examples offered from international best practices. The presentations were delivered by Co-PLAN experts, who were directly involved in the desk research, and focus groups discussions held during October 2012, namely Dritan Shutina, Aida Ciro and Darina Kokona. The three speakers covered the following topics:

a. Overall findings from preceding stages;
b. The identification of three main issues building upon these findings;
c. Social accountability aspects, mechanisms, and main actors involved;
d. Use of ICT for increased participation, transparency and overall accountability;
e. Examples of how ICT has been used on an international level for increased social accountability;

A substantial part of the event went towards participatory scenario development in three groups that addressed the major topics of the workshop: Information Asymmetry; Social Accountability Practices and Feedback and Monitoring. These group sessions were followed by a plenary review. The approach adopted by the team was that of ‘problem (red)-solution (green)’ cards. It is essential to note that the dynamics of the process (scenario development process) exceeded the anticipated response and resulted in a very interactive and fruitful session.
All proposals brought forward during the workshop manifest *inter-related features of accountability*, which explains how and why a particular proposal, for instance proposal no.1, drives participation, yet also results in increased transparency, interaction, etc. Therefore, although workshop findings were numerous, they have been organized into three main categories for optimal representation of the interests of the involved parties, optimal ownership when it comes to its implementation, and optimal harmonization of all interventions, as part of a major endeavor to increase social accountability and sustainability in the city.

A report of the presentations, issues raised, and all the scenarios that were developed during the workshop is available as a separate document. The following summary outlines the proposals considered the strongest and most realistic initiatives that could catalyze a wider social accountability push in the city of Durrës.

*Figures 7-10: Photos of the PSD Workshop*
3.1. **Information asymmetry between all three actors vis-à-vis one another’s rights and responsibilities.**

Similarly to all three groups, this group comprised of municipality officials, intermediaries (*civil society representatives*) and citizens, mainly employed by the private sector, but not only. The group identified a number of problems, and corresponding solutions, finally agreeing to a *desired vision* for the situation at hand.

3.1.1. **Existing problems and corresponding potential solutions**

a. Lack of *useful, elaborate* information, and updated information from the municipality sources, be it through direct contact at the institution, or through online media.

b. Low visibility and general lack of information on the civil society organizations operating in the city of Durrës.

Solution: To increase the quantity, variety, frequency and the number of sources of information distribution and communication with citizens

c. Poor knowledge on the rights, responsibilities of citizens and the functions of local government institutions.

Solution: To promote the need and importance of the recognition of the rights, responsibilities and functions of local institutions by the municipality and intermediaries


Solution: Revise the City Development Strategy.

e. Current operational structures with the Municipality are characterized by low efficiency in communication and information.

Solution: To ensure all current structures are fully operational and functioning, in line with the purpose they were set to serve upon establishment.

f. General loss of trust among citizens that, upon obtaining information/accomplishing communication, significant rapid action for solution will follow.

Solution: Increased efficiency of operation of existing sources and new sources; using information obtained from these sources; regularly and for all practices.

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14 Example brought up by citizens: The fact that an electronic kiosk is placed in a public space, does not mean that it serves its purpose or that it is working at all times.
g. Lack of adequate sources of information and communication specifically aimed at vulnerable groups.

Solution: Creating new sources of communication and information fitted for specific vulnerabilities/circumstances: eg. for people without access/internet knowledge.

h. Poor promotion of existing sources of information and communication by the municipality and the intermediaries.

Solution: Municipality and intermediaries are to promote regularly and maintain existing sources of information and forms of communication.

3.1.2. Vision: (desired situation)

A revised City Development Strategy with integrated Communication Channels and methods tailored for all target groups.

Given the current priorities at the municipal level, and in order to ensure ownership, and commitment to a more accountable Durrës, it was agreed on the revision of the City Development Strategy as a starting point. It was also agreed that, unlike previous versions, the City Development Strategy would have to contain a section dedicated to the Communication Strategies to be employed for enabling communication with all interest groups.

Under this scenario, the municipality of Durrës and the larger group of civil society and citizens have a chance to agree on a shared development vision for the city and a roadmap of how to accomplish it. The municipality has a chance to increase participation of the interest groups, including citizens and representatives of intermediaries, be it through participation in consultative meetings, or through the opportunities increased communication means offer. Most importantly, by revising the City Development Strategy, the Municipality is in a position to better reflect and promote social accountability aspects.

3.1.3. Specific Proposal: Revising the City Development Strategy with integrated Communication component

WHAT

A revised City Development Strategy (CDS) 2013-2020 that integrates concepts of social accountability and a City Communication Plan. The document is binding at an institutional level and ensures high participation rate of consultation group and a coherent reflection and alignment of the citizens, NGOs, and of the municipality.

WHY

In order for proposals to work, they need to be realistic, reflect local government priorities at the given time, and have ownership. By taking a comprehensive approach, this proposal combines current Local Government priorities – the revision of the City Development Strategy, with an integrated
Communication component, and increased participation, both during the process through consultative meetings, as well as in the long term, through the increased channels/methods of communication.

**HOW**

As part of the CDS revision process, the municipality will engage in numerous consultations with all interest groups in the city. During the consultative meetings, the municipality will evaluate the current infrastructure and resources it can allocate to improving information exchange and communication with its citizens and intermediaries (NGOs, CBOs). Similar to the approach of this *Social Sustainability Assessment*, the municipality ought to also identify its target groups and match the most suitable channels, methods and messages of communication. Depending on the consultation processes and the evaluation of current resources, the municipality can shape the CDS document, in collaboration with experienced NGOs in the field.

**WHO**

The Municipality of Durrës, University of Durrës – ‘Aleksandër Mojsiu’, NGOs, IT experts, students, consultative groups.

**WHEN**

1-2 years

**INDICATORS**

The CDS document itself, increases exposure and visibility, number of consultative meetings, number of actors involved; rate of accomplishment on a yearly basis; number of communication channels used; etc.

**HOW MUCH**

The cost of expertise required for preparing the Strategy, cost of developing templates for newsletter; cost of technical intervention for website adjustment, maintenance and regular updating of the site, promotional costs, etc. Tentative estimate: 10,000 – 15,000 USD.

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15 All PSD workshop scenarios will be made available to the municipality
3.2. **Current, one-size fit social accountability practices further marginalize certain groups because they are not tailored to the special needs and circumstances of different community groups.**

3.2.1. **Existing problems and corresponding potential solutions**

a. Decentralization has stopped at a municipal level, confining the administrative units function and operation to very limited administrative procedures, which means for most concerns the citizen will have to address, and seek solution at a municipality level.

Solution: Strengthening of the 6 administrative units in the city, by delegating more functions and responsibilities to them, as well as the corresponding funds. In this way, the municipality could better share its workload, and operate one level closer to the citizens through its representative administrative units.

b. Participatory Budgeting Process does not at all times address the priorities of the vulnerable groups; and when planning investments, citizens should play a crucial role in identifying where the need is greater.

Solution: A calendar of activities for the Participatory Budgeting Process should be prepared and published.

Projects (Investments) should reflect community priorities.

c. Lack frequent and regular engagement of vulnerable groups, and lack of tailored approach in engaging with them.

Solution: Organize community meetings, or, coordinate contact with the representative NGOs, CBOs, etc.

3.2.2. **Vision (Desired Situation)**

**Involving consultative groups in Participatory Budget Formulation.**

The municipality of Durrës has recognized the value of transparency in the way decisions are made, and the way funds are allocated, which is why it has introduced and it applies the practice of Participatory Budget Formulation. Nonetheless, the comparison of FGDs and IDIs highlighted that the city’s social accountability efforts can work for some groups while not for others. Whether because of technological constraints, inconvenient office hours, time-consuming processes or a language barrier, FG participants – all belonging to at least one marginalized group – reported very low levels of civic engagement (none had taken part in any participatory activity led by the Municipality). Improved participatory budget formulation can offer opportunities for citizen groups to engage the Municipality, which would serve to assess performance to date. Planning and budgeting for the upcoming year could reflect citizen priorities.

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16 The city of Durrës has 6 administrative units, one per each region, which depend on the municipality and have very limited, strictly administrative functions.
3.2.3. Specific Proposal: Increase transparency by consolidating Participatory Budget Formulation

WHAT
Consolidate the Participatory Budget Formulation process by engaging consultative groups, organizing thematic meetings, involving representatives from all interest groups, particularly those representing vulnerable groups.

WHY
In order to increase social accountability, and ensure that the way decisions are made and funds allocated is transparent to all interest groups, it is important that such groups are made part of the process themselves. Given that the municipality already has introduced the process of participatory budget formulation, yet there is a perceived lack of transparency, it is important that efforts go towards consolidating its lagging initiatives. What is important is that this increased transparency is ensured also through increased participation, which builds on the first proposal.

HOW
The Municipality will ensure that the formulation of the participatory budget is an inclusive, highly representative process. It will do so by holding meetings with consultative groups in order to gauge perception on performance to date, and to identify priorities for different groups. This will result in an improved fund allocation in various sectors. In this way, the municipality ensures increased participation and transparency, hence improved social accountability.

WHO
Municipality, Local Government Institutions, Consultation Groups, NGOs.

WHEN
Period to set up and become functional: 1-2 years

INDICATORS
Highly representative budget; performance assessment by consultation groups, number of meetings held, number of people involved.

HOW MUCH
Difficult to calculate given it is a comprehensive, medium-term intervention. As this is an institutional process, the Municipality could cover this through its own funds and seek assistance for any minor parts it cannot cover itself. Tentative estimate: minimally 30,000 USD.
3.3. Poorly maintained and promoted current feedback and monitoring mechanisms with low institutional responsiveness rates to citizens’ requests and complaints.

3.3.1. Existing problems and corresponding potential solutions

a. No information points in each region; for instance in the case of region ‘Durrësi i Ri’ (previously known as Këneta).

   Solution: Expand the information network service, from center towards the city suburbs (new periphery) by making available more information to the community, and increasing the municipality visibility.

b. Lack of activity coordination between the intermediaries operational in a particular area and the local government authorities.

   Solution: Increase coordination between the intermediaries and the local government authorities’ representatives, such is the case of the head of the administrative unit. Intermediaries should see in the Municipality a partner, not only as and when required by specific projects.

c. Meetings between Intermediaries and citizens are limited (if any when funding for projects is available).

   Solution: Intermediaries hold regular meetings with the community, not only in times of project activities.

d. IT infrastructure is limited in the suburban parts of the city.

   Solution: Set up a free telephone line for citizen complaints and civil emergencies in terms of service provision.

e. Official responses to citizen complaints are not always timely.

   Solution: The Municipality enforces the standard times for issuing responses to citizens’ complaints.

f. Standard inefficient practices to gauge citizen satisfaction/ opinion.

   Solution: Regularly produce and publish surveys reflecting current issues high on the socio-economic and political agenda, which influence decision-making

g. Limited range of digitalized services available in the municipality of Durrës

   Solution: Invest in digitalizing certain services, such as tax collection, various procedure applications, submission of official requests, etc.
3.3.2. **Vision (Desired Situation)**

Citizen Feedback becomes an integral part of local governance through a highly interactive Municipal Website.

The municipality increases the number and efficiency of communication channels with the community, including all vulnerable groups, based on the particular needs and specifics of each group. The municipality makes monitoring an inseparable part of their work practice, particularly concerning service provision and communication with the citizens/intermediaries through a new, functional and highly interactive city website.

3.3.3. **Specific Proposal: Transforming the City website**

**WHAT**

This scenario aims to transform the official municipal website into a communication portal. The new site should act not only as a source of (timely, accurate, relevant) information, but also as a medium for interaction between all stakeholders. Additionally, interactive e-government functionality would cut down on excessive ranks in the city hall, personnel resources and time spent on addressing the sporadic requests that come from direct contact, and the information and feedback gathered through the site would be used during the process of city planning and budgeting.

**WHY**

In order to increase interaction with its interest groups, and facilitate certain services, it is important that the Municipality works on a new website with expanded, improved, efficient features. This intervention is particularly relevant, given that the median age of the population is relatively young, well-acquainted with the use of internet. In addition, the Municipality not only appeals more to youth, but it also offers a chance to adult citizens (through the help of their internet-savvy children) to acquire information online, obtain certain services (such as paying taxes), post a complaint, send a request, download important documents/forms, etc. A new, functional, interactive website is a very good starting point for improved monitoring mechanisms, and increased two-way exchange of information and communication.

**HOW**

1. Review and adoption of the municipal website to which can be added pages / sections specifically for the residents that could include: My Durrës / or residents of Durrës.
   a. Rights and responsibilities of the citizen / resident
   b. Map of service delivery, the responsible institution, contact
   c. List of services provided by the municipality / other local institutions
   d. Forms for various applications in the borough
   e. Functionality to send a request / complaint (with SMS-compatibility)
   f. Calendar of activities / workshops / meetings / public hearings and opportunities for participation booked (with SMS alerts).
   g. Track & Trace requests / complaints, showing progress.
   h. Various organizations list their contact details
2. Frequent and regular update of the information and material published on the official website, thus increasing the possibility of using these materials and the wider community to make more informed choices and suggestions.

3. Introduction of section: Frequently Asked Questions, to avoid some response times of issues that can be addressed at this level, as well as avoid repetitions.
   a) This section ought to be visibly displayed on the front page.
   b) In case the FAQ does not address a particular question/concern, an option should offer the chance to post a question/concern, which if deemed of interest to the general public, can be added to the FAQ section.

4. Publication of an electronic newsletter on a monthly basis, which can be delivered to all registered persons in their email addresses, or can be downloaded directly from the site. Content should include important developments, calendar of activities / workshops / meetings / public hearings and opportunities for participation booked. The newsletter should become a useful information source and point of reference among citizens, public, and private sector, including businesses in the city.

**WHO**

Municipality, university of Durrës students and experts

**WHEN**

1-2 years

**INDICATORS**

Active site and content online; the response by citizens to the site and its efficiency advantages (based on online user survey), number of complaints issued and addressed, etc.

**HOW MUCH**

The cost of maintaining the purchase of a new template / technical intervention for adjustment, maintenance and regular updating of the site, promotional costs. Tentative estimate: 10,000 USD.
4. Key Considerations for Next Steps

While the problems addressed by the groups during the workshops were easily identified, in most cases followed by practical solutions, it was noted that there was a tendency for the scenario to remain at a “wish-list” level as assigning or determining ownership of such suggested scenarios was not as clear as the problem-solution identification. Some of the most prevalent and emerging issues identified during the scenario development were the following:

1. Scenarios have to be part on an integrated action plan. Whilst the Municipality is responsible for implementing a number of the suggested interventions, the intermediaries, and the community alike need to play an active part and take ownership of the interventions/actions directly connected to the community and vulnerable groups. During the workshop, we tried to engage all three groups and highlight the fact that such changes are not one institution’s or one individual’s responsibility.

2. There is a clear need for a Communication Strategy at a municipal level in order to plan and ensure implementation of all the information-communication based interventions. An important component are Monitoring mechanisms, as most ideas/investments lack sustainability upon implementation due to poor maintenance or lack of functionality, visibility, utility etc. In addition, the strategy should reflect approaches particularly tailored to various vulnerable groups and various age-groups in the city and the best way to reach out to them.

3. A significant number of scenarios that were developed were more in the form of action seeking to trigger the action, which in turn grants the solution. For instance, some practices are already part of the municipal agenda and way of operating. What the scenarios highlighted was the need to make them operational, increase their efficiency and functionality. For example, to address information and communication, a strategy was suggested in order to align all actions/practices under one set of agreed objectives and increase their efficiency and outreach.

The PSD workshop and the scenarios developed by the participants representing civil society and the public sector in Durrës address many of the issues raised during the first two phases of the social assessment. This engagement across a broad group of participants in a solution-based process offers a number of specific scenarios and actions where more open communication and social accountability practices can make a significant impact in addressing the gaps in urban service delivery and accountability identified in the early phases of the process.

Durrës as a municipality has an excellent opportunity to incorporate these findings into its city policies and practices as it goes through the process of revising the local economic development strategy. In addition, by creating opportunities for residents to have an input and provide feedback to issues and programs that impact their communities, the level of meaningful engagement can increase. It is suggested that stakeholders pursuing these initiatives should meet quarterly to report on their efforts and consult in a continuing inclusive process.
Annex 1: Social Sustainability Index

Concept note

The objective is to assist the municipalities, civic groups and NGOs to develop indicators that gauge progress towards increasing social accountability and access to services by marginalized communities or vulnerable groups.

Based on the three-phase process undertaken by the project teams in the five municipalities – Municipal Profile, Focus Group Discussions and Participatory Scenario Workshops – the study team intends to outline parameters for selecting (a) indicators that could be tailored to each municipality; and (b) indicators that can be applied across all the municipalities. The indicators should reflect the priority issues within each municipality and how key actors involved in the Participatory Scenario Workshops can use these indicators to further action.

Assumptions

The preference is to identify indicators and any possible index deriving from these indicators that are in the domain or competency of the local authorities. This means that the indicator measures activities that the municipality can influence through its policies, programs and specific projects or by designated representatives of civil society such as intermediary NGOs or community-based organizations.

The selection of indicators should reflect the ‘four pillars’ of social accountability as outlined in the study methodology, these include:

a) Participation — defined as implementing mechanisms that enable citizens to become part of the decision-making process.

b) Transparency — defined as making city stakeholder information and operations publicly available and useful.

c) Feedback (Response) — defined as ensuring citizen-government communication goes in both directions, that expressed citizen needs are matched with responsive action.

d) Monitoring — defined as the ability to track performance and evaluate effectiveness.17

Participation and Transparency are the primary focus when selecting indicators with Feedback and Monitoring combined as feedback mechanisms. The index also needs to capture the role of different stakeholders in strengthening each pillar. The responsibility and opportunities of promoting city accountability acknowledges the role played by the local authorities, citizens, and intermediaries (NGOs, CBOs, businesses).

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17 Adapted from Social Accountability in Palestinian Local Governance and Service Provision
Framing the Index

Within this framework of the ‘four pillars’ that has guided the Assessment's process, it is suggested that the index is organized around the five suggested dimensions outlined below. The choices of questions to address within each pillar reflect the issues that arose across the five municipalities during the course of the assessment.

1. Participation – Opportunities: an indicator of the local government’s openness to citizen engagement and inputs into decisions that affect them. Measures could include the city's provision of various forms of consultation such as open door days and interactive Q/A sections of the website, as well as measures of democracy such as publicly elected city councils.

2. Participation – Engagement: as a complement to opportunities that are available, this indicator takes into account, the level of initiative taken by citizens, individually or in representative groups, to take part in civic life. An important indicator is the degree to which local councils are representative of the community (in particular marginalized groups). Measures of attendance to city-sponsored participatory activities and use of the interactive city website features are also descriptive of citizen self-driven involvement.

3. Transparency – Information Availability: the disclosure of information related to local decisions. In particular, budgets, plans and formal proceedings should be made available to the public. Both virtual and physical sources - information centers and the city website, for example - are necessary components of a transparent local government.

4. Transparency – Information Access: the city's readiness to make productive use of open government data. The use of communication methods that reach multiple sectors of society, ICT capabilities, and the production and publication of clear documents that present city processes and functions in an accessible way are steps towards ensuring socially-inclusive accountability.

5. Feedback – the effectiveness of two-way communication between citizens and their local governments. The reach of redress mechanisms, the response rate to complaints, and the existence and acceptance of evaluation and monitoring ensure that accountability practices result in positive change.
A cross cutting theme within these five dimensions is the use of information technologies.

The simplest form can be the selection of 25 indicators/issues organized into the five dimensions measured only using a 1/0 format (1: yes, 0: no), giving each dimension (or sub-index) a score of 0 to 5. This index, using yes or no responses, provides an easy to use measure of the effectiveness of existing social accountability practices and identifies areas that can benefit from improvement. It is important to note that the index does not intend to measure each city against an ideal. Rather, it was designed to compare cities with a common history and some shared characteristics. The format allows for the index to grow as do the cities and their social accountably practices. Although in their current form they are somewhat tied to the evaluator's judgment of the availability and functionality of social accountability tools, these measures can be made more complex and precise over time.

The present index can be a valuable tool throughout a social assessment process. Firstly, given the lack of city and community-level data, this format provides an alternative way to assess social accountability levels. Secondly, the specific indicators and definitions can be adapted to each city or target group and used during the Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews and the responses averaged to gauge the key social accountability issues. The results can then be used during the Scenario Development Workshop as a diagnostic tool to help the participants identify opportunities and challenges. In this way, the index becomes an integrated component of the Assessment process.

Furthermore, the index provides a monitoring tool that can be applied by a city’s stakeholders to regularly evaluate progress over time. City authorities, or intermediaries such as universities, can potentially carry out an annual update of the index independently, thus building a track record of the city’s work on social accountability. All cities highlighted the need for monitoring social accountability activities. The yearly index results can become a powerful tool in recognizing the efforts of city stakeholders every year and motivating all actors to contribute to strengthening social accountability in their city.

The tables below contain the proposed 5 indicators for each dimension.
### Index Results for Durres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation - Opportunities</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>yes =1</th>
<th>no = 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the city hold consultation meetings with the public?</td>
<td>Face-to-face interaction with city leaders was considered valuable in an environment plagued by bureaucratic blocks. These consultation meetings could be anything from open door mayor days to public hearings.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are there elected neighborhood councils or equivalent structures?</td>
<td>Local Community Council, Local Administrative Units, etc. were widely recognized as key intermediaries, yet not currently operating to meet this potential. Public election of members could make them more accountable to their constituents and lead to more efficient councils.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does the city administration present municipal budgets to neighborhoods as part of the formal fiscal preparation cycle?</td>
<td>The city should have an adopted mechanism to obtain citizen input on budget allocations in relation to service provision, infrastructure and neighborhood facilities. Making presentations to neighborhood councils and community groups provides opportunities for gathering neighborhood priorities that are not often possible in larger Council public hearings.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are vulnerable groups consulted when devising strategic policy documents?</td>
<td>To determine whether marginalized groups are part of the city’s decision-making process for city-wide policies such as the City Development Strategy.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Does the city have a program to engage with CSOs when reaching out to vulnerable groups?</td>
<td>To assess the city-intermediary relationship in working to increase visibility and outreach to these groups to vulnerable groups. &quot;City&quot; meaning the municipality or other local authority.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participation - Opportunities total score**  3/5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation - Engagement</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>yes =1</th>
<th>no = 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are minority or vulnerable communities represented in the current city council?</td>
<td>Within multi-ethnic context of the ECA region, to gage the level of diversity and participation of minority community on the city council.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are NGOs actively engaged in representing the interest of vulnerable groups?</td>
<td>To determine whether vulnerable groups have a go-to organization to provide support as well as pursue their interests in the public arena.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are neighborhood councils (or similar structures) effectively linking the citizens to the city (or municipality)?</td>
<td>To evaluate the degree to which citizens consider their interests taken into account in neighborhood level governance/projects.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are there youth-based outreach programs for civic engagement?</td>
<td>To determine the level of engagement and civic education of the youth as a strategic cohort.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is the website considered to be a reliable source of information?</td>
<td>To measure the effectiveness of the city’s main ICT portal/communication channel.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participation - Engagement total score**  4/5

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18 Though it is not a formal/official program approved, they collaborate to some extent to reach out to vulnerable groups. Currently yes, although there is not an obligatory mandate for that. According to the Electoral Code, political parties should have 30% of women representatives. There is not such a rule on minority or other vulnerable groups. Actually the city council comprises 45 members (36 M/9 F).  
19 Some categories: women, Roma and youth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency - Info Availability</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>yes =1 no = 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are citizens given sufficient notice about upcoming city council meetings?</td>
<td>To determine whether city council meetings are open not only in theory but also in practice, since a common finding was that citizens cannot attend meetings because they find out about them too late.</td>
<td>0(^{21})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are municipal council decisions posted online in a timely matter?</td>
<td>To determine whether the outcomes of council meetings are made available even to those who cannot attend.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are city budgets available online?</td>
<td>Budget transparency as part of open government practices.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Does the municipality have an open data policy?</td>
<td>Meant to gage how open the municipality is to making data public from different sectorial programs (such as schools, hospitals)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are CSOs required to have open data practices?</td>
<td>To determine whether there are transparency stipulations for intermediaries.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transparency - info availability total score \(3/5\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency - Information Access</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>yes =1 no = 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is there an active information desk available for citizen information?</td>
<td>Another common suggestions during the field activities: a physical information booth with helpful staff to help citizens find the information they need without having to navigate complex city administration structures.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is there a document (charter) outlining the responsibilities of both government and citizens that is publicly accessible?</td>
<td>Citizen charters have been a successful tool for eliminating information asymmetries and misunderstandings.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does the municipality provide support to citizens regarding access or navigation of its ICT tools?</td>
<td>To maximize the impact of using ICTs, citizens should be able to manage at a basic level the technology from the user end, thus addressing the digital divide.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are there ICT training opportunities for public employees?</td>
<td>To maximize the impact of e-government and other such tools, government employees should be able to manage at a basic level the technology.</td>
<td>0(^{22})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Does the city utilize the various forms of media to disseminate information?</td>
<td>Throughout the workshops, solutions included using the available slots in TV, radio and print media to disseminate city information. Local governments should take advantage of this possibility given that citizens embrace the media option.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transparency - Access total score \(1/5\)

\(^{21}\) Estimated 0 to show that not all categories of population have this notification and outreach is not spread widely in the local community

\(^{22}\) There are many existing opportunities in the market, however if the context is whether they are being offered by local authorities, the answer is no for the time being (or they are rather sporadic)
| Feedback/Monitoring | Rationale | yes =1  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is the time limit for grievance response abided by?</td>
<td>The effectiveness of grievance redress mechanisms depends on a mandatory response time that is satisfactory to the users and implemented.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do grievance/complaint systems use multiple types of technology?</td>
<td>ICTs can be very valuable in extending engagement opportunities, but there need to be a set of options to accommodate the varying levels of technology access among groups.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is there a system for tracking the responsiveness to grievances of various departments/service providers?</td>
<td>To determine whether the departments responsible for redress mechanisms are functioning effectively.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is there an annual citizen service satisfaction survey?</td>
<td>Regular evaluations of city wide or specific department's functioning in terms of service provision.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is the city website updated regularly?</td>
<td>To determine whether the city website can be part of a fluid communication system, information needs to be kept relevant, especially the Frequently Asked Questions section.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Feedback/monitoring total score 0/5**

**Visualization:**

![Social Accountability Index - Durres](image-url)
Comparison to Other Cities

**Skopje**

**Sarajevo**

**Banka Luka**

**Prishtina**