

## **1. Background**

### **1.1. Civil society commitment**

During the last decades citizens have been frequently taking the initiative in reclaiming their rightful place as the catalysts of social change. The civil society is considered a “global mosaic” with new frontiers including the role of the women and youth, local community, micro-enterprise and participatory methods, which are considered indicators of a healthy society.

“Civil society, together with the state and market, is one of the three “spheres” that interface in the making of democratic societies. Civil society is the sphere in which social movements become organised. The organisations of civil society, which represent many diverse and sometimes contradictory social interests...include church-related groups, trade unions, co-operatives, services organisations, community groups and youth organisations, as well as academic institutions and others”. (UNDP 1993)

In the last years, particularly in western countries, a stronger attention to the problems of development and international co-operation has been given at the grass-roots level. Citizens organised in associations, groups or NGOs representing the civil society, have taken the initiative and concrete actions towards less developed countries or countries in emergency affected by either natural or man-made disasters.

The magnitude of this international commitment has been particularly significant in case of some recent tragedies such as the war in former Yugoslavia. The phenomenon of the citizens’ participation in international co-operation activities has become more relevant than it was in the past.

Apart from or in addition to charitable reasons, rationales behind this trend should be sought in improved life conditions and well-being of the western country populations characterised by surplus resources and a widespread knowledge and responsibility for the world’s problems.

In the advanced industrialised societies every new generation shows more interest for the post-materialistic values than the previous one. Post-materialistic values are those oriented to “a less impersonal society” that “give more importance to the opinion of the people about the decision making process in the working environment and in the community”. These values “defend the freedom of word”, give “priority to the ideas rather than money” and “try to make our towns and countryside more beautiful”. On the other side, materialism aspires to “maintain a high level of economic growth”, while fighting against the high cost of living” Its main objectives are to “keep a stable economy”, “strengthen the defence of the country”, “maintain the order of the nation”, and “fight against the criminality”. Although there are particular periods of uncertainty and economic crisis which can undermine the post-materialist values the trend in western countries is inexorably towards them. (Inglehart, 1990)

### **1.2. Development and social exclusion**

The UNDP 1997 annual report on human development reports, throughout all the world, there are 358 groups that, presumably, have an essential role in the processes of economic development (alone they have an income greater than the ones held by countries inhabited by more or less half of the World's population). Generally, it is stated that apart from the few who take the fundamental decisions, only a fifth of mankind is able, even if in a subordinate way, to have an active role in the processes of development. The rest are

outcast and excluded to various extents. On the lower level of this scale are people who, for physical or psychological reasons, are disadvantaged in the competition for individual success. Among these, are those that stumble in institutions, present in every country, which are created to exclude ("cure" or "rehabilitate") those who are considered a danger or an inconvenience to "normal" social life.

According to a widespread idea, development would be the natural outcome of the adventurous and creative spirit of single individuals. It is principally the outcome of the guide-role of stronger persons, usually more bold and aggressive, that compete for success and associate to form strong groups. The competition between these groups would create development, benefiting all. Exclusion is not, therefore, an occasional event. It is the supporting element of the present forms of social organisation. It is created by the fact that the individual qualities of human beings are opposed to the social ones, instead of being harmoniously combined. It is like if, during a storm, the helmsman would throw overboard all the rest of the crew to save himself. Probably, in this way, no one could be saved. Exclusion deprives human society of the great potentialities that are generated from the natural tendency to associate to solve problems that singles could not solve alone. Nevertheless, many consider absolutely natural that those who have success in the struggle for life should assume the absolute guide-role excluding the rest. The others are the ones who remain back, the beneficiaries of the initiatives of the stronger groups. They are, substantially excluded, to various extents, from the most meaningful moments of development: information, development, decision making, management and evaluation. They are framed in programmes and actions not chosen by them. The various political systems try to capture their consent. Some in a rude way (authoritative and demagogic regimes), others more gently (the democracies which, through parties, election and parliaments, promote everyone's formal participation to social life). Substantially, though, the overwhelming majority of the people do not have the chance to be really active in the more general development processes. Social organisations based mostly on the individual's personal initiative generate systems in which some count meaningfully, and others have less and less importance, until they have none at all. (International Network against Social Exclusion, 1998)

Economic and social development is generally implemented with the lack of participation of the population. The following are the main mechanisms of exclusion.

- *Centralism*, that is the fact that all the most important decisions that concern a great number of persons that live in different and far away areas are taken in few central seats. Centralism can be corrected with decentralisation that allows public and private actors at the local levels to take a large amount of decisions on matters that can be solved locally and to be active in processes that imply central decisions.
- *Hierarchy*, that is the straight transmission from the top to the base of decisions regarding users and operators of public and private utilities; it can be corrected with the activation of various forms of information, communication, discussion and confrontation through which, whoever takes the decisions can keep in mind the different point of views of the operators that have to put them into practice and of the potential beneficiaries, while these can take into account the necessities of co-ordination, efficiency, cost saving etc., that managers face.
- *Decision making*, that is the fact that many decisions are taken without any consultation with the parties concerned, with the idea that it is better to respond, although in an imperfect way, rather than leaving matters unsolved; it can be corrected with the participation of the social parties concerned, adopting simple mechanisms which can avoid the rising of possible conflicts.

- *Sectoralism*, that is the fact that every aspect of economical and social life is treated separately, fragmentarily, in a simplified and non communicative way, it can be corrected with an integrated approach, according to which, the different sectarian aspects can be treated as a whole, as function of the more complete solution of the problem that has to be faced
- *Welfarism*, that is the fact that subsidies and aids are given to people in difficulty, increasing their dependence and passivity, incurring into extremely high costs; the welfare mentality is common to whoever thinks of poor, handicapped, weak groups and excluded as a dead weight for development and that their survival must be assured for pure humanitarian duties; the most severe degradation of welfarism is the institutionalisation, that looks upon a person as pure segregated objects. It can be corrected by adopting work methods that stimulate and favour the autonomy and the active role of the weaker disadvantaged, showing how, each person, notwithstanding the difficulties it faces, is a resource for development and can be viewed as an occasion for improving human relations (International Network against Social Exclusion, 1998)

The need to create a different model of development is generated by the indisputable assertion that the models prevailing in the past have stimulated unbalanced development, which brings about a dangerous menace against pacific living and humanity's future.

After the end of the cold war, the world Summits of the 90s\* and the work of the United Nations have allowed, for the first time, a general meditation on development, starting with its definition. Today there is a general agreement on some points.

Development is a social process through which human organised communities try to satisfy their needs. Development is held to be "human" if its objective is the substantial satisfaction of everyone's needs, and "sustainable" if satisfaction today does not prejudice that of tomorrow.

Moreover, development has a low human content when it lets the normal human tendencies towards competition and selfishness degenerate into violence and prevarication; this occurs when the aforesaid tendencies are not balanced by the other ones (equally normal) tending towards co-operation and social life. Thus very severe imbalances are generated and the development determined actually benefits only a fifth of the world's population.

Social exclusion must be considered as a precise indicator of development with low human content and so it is a phenomenon that concerns all citizens. Since exclusion is a clear signal of the lack of space and participation of a great number of people, it is also a clear sign of the low quality of the democratic processes that, instead, should be the basis of equilibrated and lasting development. (International Network against Social Exclusion, 1998)

---

\* The principal World Summits of the 90's have taken place in Rio (Environment), Cairo (Population), Beijing (Women), (Human Rights), Copenhagen (Social development), Rome (Nutrition), New York (Childhood).

## **2. General Framework of DC**

In development jargon, DC is still a relatively new and not altogether becoming term, but it probably has the advantage of saying clearly what it intends. It implies, correctly, that past development efforts have too narrowly operated in the context of centralised inter-governmental co-operation. The concept of an 'exclusive club' still largely prevails, but international co-operation, in a decentralised mode, recognises that a "people's sector" has a growing place in development and solidarity efforts. (Huggins, 1997)

In the past there were several experiences of DC mainly related to the twinned cities. The term "twinned cities" dates back to 1952. The "twinned phenomenon" appeared during the post-war (II World War) years, initially based on political values as it helped in altering mentalities and was committed to bringing France and Germany together. That movement was aimed at developing links between cities that shared a common ideal of fraternity and mutual understanding beyond historical confrontations. (Grenoble Twinned Cities, 1999)

Currently, DC seeks to reflect the fact that genuine development involves actors beyond the mere government sector. The increasing place of "civil society", the informal groups and formal organisations and communities who have a stake in the national interest and in development, has been recognised, in large part as a result of their own efforts and contributions. (Huggins, 1997)

### **2.1. Different views about DC**

For the European Community, DC is a development method (not a specific instrument), through which public funds (in particular, those of the Lomé Convention) support decentralised agents - NGOs and other associations working for the development of populations, representative local authorities - in their initiatives in designing and managing local or sectoral development programmes.

DC is based on a participatory development approach, centred on the needs expressed by the people concerned and their representative organisations and on how they wish to see these needs met. This enhances the grassroots democratic social fabric. DC is based on the logic of local development. It requires a programmed approach of envisaging development actions, as well as coherence between interventions by decentralised agents and governments, and co-operation between them, while respecting each other's role and autonomy. (Ryelandt, 1997)

For the European Commission, DC is a new co-operation approach: it is an action carried out by a local agent in a Southern country, defined, in the broad meaning of the term, as a non-state agent. Participation of a partner from an EU member state is not indispensable and if there is one, the partner is not necessarily a local authority. The partner may be an NGO.

In several countries, such as France, DC is directly linked to the type of agent in the North. It is a form of co-operation undertaken by a local authority, theoretically, in

partnership with another local authority in the South, Eastern Europe and also in the North. In practice, these partners are diverse and mostly associative.

The different approaches may overlap due to consultations between local authorities and NGOs, in the North and South, with regard to development programmes that take into account the expectations of all citizens, especially those most marginalised. In this regard, the objectives of the different approaches converge, forming a common aspiration: development and local democracy. (Vielajus, 1997)

At this point, it is interesting to describe the Italian point of view concerning DC. In fact, in the last years, scores of Italian local government institutions such as Regions, Provinces and Municipalities have been involved in humanitarian activities with other countries. Some activities of DC started on a small and isolated scale as twinning projects or solidarity actions. Some others have been co-ordinated by the Italian Co-operation (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) or UN organisations (UNDP and WHO). On several occasions, human and material resources belonging to the involved institutions have been integrated with the efforts of different sectors of the civil society engaged in international aid coming from the same geographical area. The Italian local government institutions have been able to mobilise technical and solidarity resources of their territory promoting human development at the community level.

The Italian model of DC sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to systematic co-operation links between local communities in donor countries and local communities in countries where multilateral human development initiatives are being implemented. DC is an integral part of these programmes and takes place within their overall institutional framework. The objective of these links is to create and consolidate long-term cultural, technical and economic partnerships between local communities in the North and the South as a tool for promoting human development objectives.

In this context, "local communities" refers to a decentralised political-administrative level of a country such as municipality, or groups of towns, which refer to local administrative body such as province, county or department. They include the political administration such as the mayor and city councillors, and the population. For the purposes of DC, the local community is represented by a committee or working group which includes the local authorities, representatives of public institutions and organised civil society groups such as trade unions, NGOs, associations, professional bodies, the commercial sector, etc. These committees provide a venue for permanent dialogue between political authorities and the population related to social development issues in their area. The organised local community is thus the main protagonist of local human development initiatives, with its territory, its resources, its culture, its history and its potential. Moreover, through the inclusion of DC in governmental development co-operation programmes, local communities in donor countries take on a new role, as partners and stakeholders in developing their country's policies and strategies for international development co-operation (See annex 1).

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF DECENTRALISED CO-OPERATION IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

### **TERRITORIAL:**

That is planning taking place in a well-defined area, small enough to permit the active participation of the local community and large enough to have the resources necessary to support local development plans and to constitute an authoritative interlocutor for national and international policies.

### **CONNECTED:**

That is linked with sustainable human development programmes, which can guarantee linking local development to national and international policies. The harmonisation of micro and macro approaches is the premise for effectiveness and sustainability. By elaborating local development plans, specific projects can be inserted in a unified strategy.

### **INTEGRATED:**

That is the necessary association of income, health, education, environment and human rights, as components of development.

### **PARTICIPATORY:**

That is focusing on concerted decision-making processes between public institutions and civil society

### **SUSTAINABLE:**

That is maintaining economic and organisational support to development in linked communities, beyond the conclusion of a given co-operation project

### **PARTNERSHIPS:**

That is relationships among communities in the North and South, with the different entities involved, in international development co-operation - governments, local authorities, NGOs, international organisations

### **VISION:**

That is conceiving the social development as a "common interest", as a process which not only improves economic indicators but the quality of human relationships and individual opportunities in all parts of the world.

*(Italian Co-operation,/UNDP/UNOPS, 1999)*

### 3. The Experience of DC in Former Yugoslavia

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, war has once again become a common experience in Europe for the first time since World War II.

“What happened after the fall of the Berlin Wall; after the period when many of us thought that we were entering into a new phase of international relations? What happened to the international community when suddenly there was no nuclear threat anymore, no threat of mutually-assured destruction anymore, no danger of one or the other power conquering huge parts of the world and subjecting them to their particular way of living or thinking or philosophy? We have switched from the highly unsatisfactory so-called Yalta System of international relations, with which nobody was happy, but which was a system based on stable and predictable international relations, to an even less satisfactory non-system of totally unstable and even less predictable international relations. I have to come honestly to that conclusion, not because I personally feel sorry for the disappearance of Yalta, but because, with hindsight, it appears that that system gave us a certain amount of security and of predictability. From a system of more or less stable relations, we have entered into a system of world disorder after the fall of the Berlin Wall.” (Najman, D. 1994)

Eastern European countries, especially the ones of former Yugoslavia, underwent a period of significant cultural changes that should be taken into account in order to understand the problems of war and post-war environment that will help identify the most appropriate strategy of co-operation. Some ideas concerning the war atmosphere are summarised below (See annex 2)

#### 3.1. Aspects of the war in former Yugoslavia

*“War is an outburst of strength where the rights of the weakest groups, the freedom to discuss and to disagree and where tolerance and individuality are enormously reduced.” (Carrino, 1997)*

The political and cultural environment of the former Yugoslavian countries was partially marked by nationalism, polarisation, ethnic discrimination, manipulation of media, where lies were a normal way to relate with the others and where violence was considered a natural way to solve conflicts.

- Following independence dreams, “the new nation” offered mythical stories about its origin, making up an “autistic” history, separate from the history of the neighbouring nations in an attempt to justify the need to be excluded from the others. The stories about origin were based upon a religious history that blames others for one’s own ills. The principal aim is revenge and the historical proofs are unilateral, ill minded, exaggerated, and without any doubts, false.
- We may say without exaggeration that the television brought us to the war. This is the principal difference between the Second World War and the present war in the Balkans. The television, using all available means, presents the stories of violence perpetrated on us by others. This feeling then fosters our own justification for violence against them, leaving it all to look like legitimate defence. Always beyond reality, the television uses pictures to amplify the news of violence against us, but remains silent about our violence on others.
- The new ethnic myths of the new nations are based on the idea of the same blood and territory, the language and religion. Each nation has actuated the mass psychopathology of aggressiveness against the others. At the same time the ethnic dreams are the dreams of cultural autism, that the culture can, contrary to the reality, awaken only under the conditions of the pure absoluteness of isolation. New nationalistic tendencies sustained by the new states, above all interrelated by folk elements of culture, seek to find a support in the national history seen as heroic deeds. The new frontiers (the war) destroyed lives, families, citizenship, and fidelity, not to mention culture. They destroyed relationships. They succeeded to cancel the memory of more than seventy years of life together, with pretext to avoid aggression and pressure by somebody else, thus sacrificing all that was good.

- The lack of democracy in the new States (there can be no democracy during the war); the general purge of individuals, especially intellectuals; the relentless pursuit of the press, incorrectly called "independent press", for ideological cleansing, denouncement of origins, detraction of dissenters; robbery and murder; the absence of an independent judiciary - all this doesn't favour the flourishing of culture, let alone tolerance
- Without taking the nationalistic choices made by each group into consideration, the new regimes inherited the worst characteristics of the desperate times, i.e. autocracy-produced nepotism, faction and ideological separation, corruption, elimination of persons, everyday crime, and a black market of arms.
- There is a collective memory in the culture, from different points of view, and it mustn't be destroyed because it represents the world inheritance. (Ivekovic, 1995)

Some *negative* examples of human behaviour much diffused in former Yugoslavia and observed in other war contexts (e.g. Central American conflicts) are described below.

- Psychosocial trauma as inhumanisation.  
Impoverishment of the human capabilities such as capability to think brightly, to communicate truth, sensibility for suffering of the others, are very common. Behaviour changes toward ideological rigidity, evasive scepticism, paranoid defence, hatred and desire for revenge. An uncertain and insecure destiny, reinforced by the encompassing irrationality, fosters the need to belong, the need to be part of a group. Fear-induced psychological characteristics such as feelings of vulnerability and weakness, excessive "state of alert", loss of control over one's own life, and an altered sense of reality are quite diffused.
- Crystallisation of social relationships  
The humanity of the enemy has been denied and consequently the enemy has been refused as an interlocutor. Social polarisation, institutionalised lies and militarisation of social life characterise a war situation. Polarisation promotes psychosomatic disorders. War life causes a schizophrenic attitude between subjective and real life because it is impossible to confirm the personal knowledge and experience in reality (except in particular small groups). Lies have become a life style. Militarisation of social life can promote militarisation of mind. (For example, in the conflict in El Salvador, the upper class children, asked how the problem of poverty could be solved, identified "elimination of the poor" as the answer) For people growing in this context, contempt for human life, the law of the strongest as social criterion and the corruption as life style are accepted as natural creating thus a vicious circle. (Martin-Baró, 1988)

### 3.2. Answer of the international community

*"To believe that the main problems are physical infrastructures and resources is to blench from reality. The events have just shown us that the violent disruption of human relations can in a few minutes destroy what taken centuries of hard and patient work to build"* (Italian Co-operation/UNDP/UNOPS/WHO 1998)

The international community hasn't proved to be prepared well enough to cope with such a situation. The experience of humanitarian aid in developing countries was only partially useful for such a complex environment. The activities aimed at prevention of conflict were non-existent, while those in place, that could face the emergency of war, could only meet needs of the people in a very imperfect way. Already in 1993, within the UN appeal, a critical position was taken towards seeing the intervention of the international community in a more comprehensive way.

"The immediate help, is not enough, not even in this desperate time. As soon as possible certain initiatives should be taken to re-establish some level of the normality, and long term rehabilitation. In achieving this, community, education and production services are of great importance. These efforts of the rehabilitation



will improve the stability, and may strengthen the civil society structure, which remains the most efficient protection against political polarisation. Without these steps toward rehabilitation, the humanitarian agencies will be obliged to work in the ambient of extreme chaos and social aversion." (United Nations, 1993)

The war had destroyed houses, facilities, factories and other infrastructures. The most visible damage was to things, but the most profound damage was to human relations. Rebuilding infrastructures without rebuilding the possibility of civil, democratic coexistence at the same time is side-stepping the real issue.

Although the objectives indicated by the solidarity groups were reasonable, traditional international co-operation has considerable difficulty in responding to them and, above all, in finding forms of action that are consistent with the objective of human reconstruction. Suffering from top-heaviness, centralism, sectorialism, authoritarianism and a charity mentality, international co-operation frequently imposes its own pre-established solutions, which fail to take into account demands for peace and democracy. All the problems mentioned above derive from a failure to consult the people involved. (Italian Co-operation/UNDP/UNOPS/WHO, 1998)

It is within this context that DC started to be implemented, introducing a novelty into a traditional approach of the international co-operation activities.

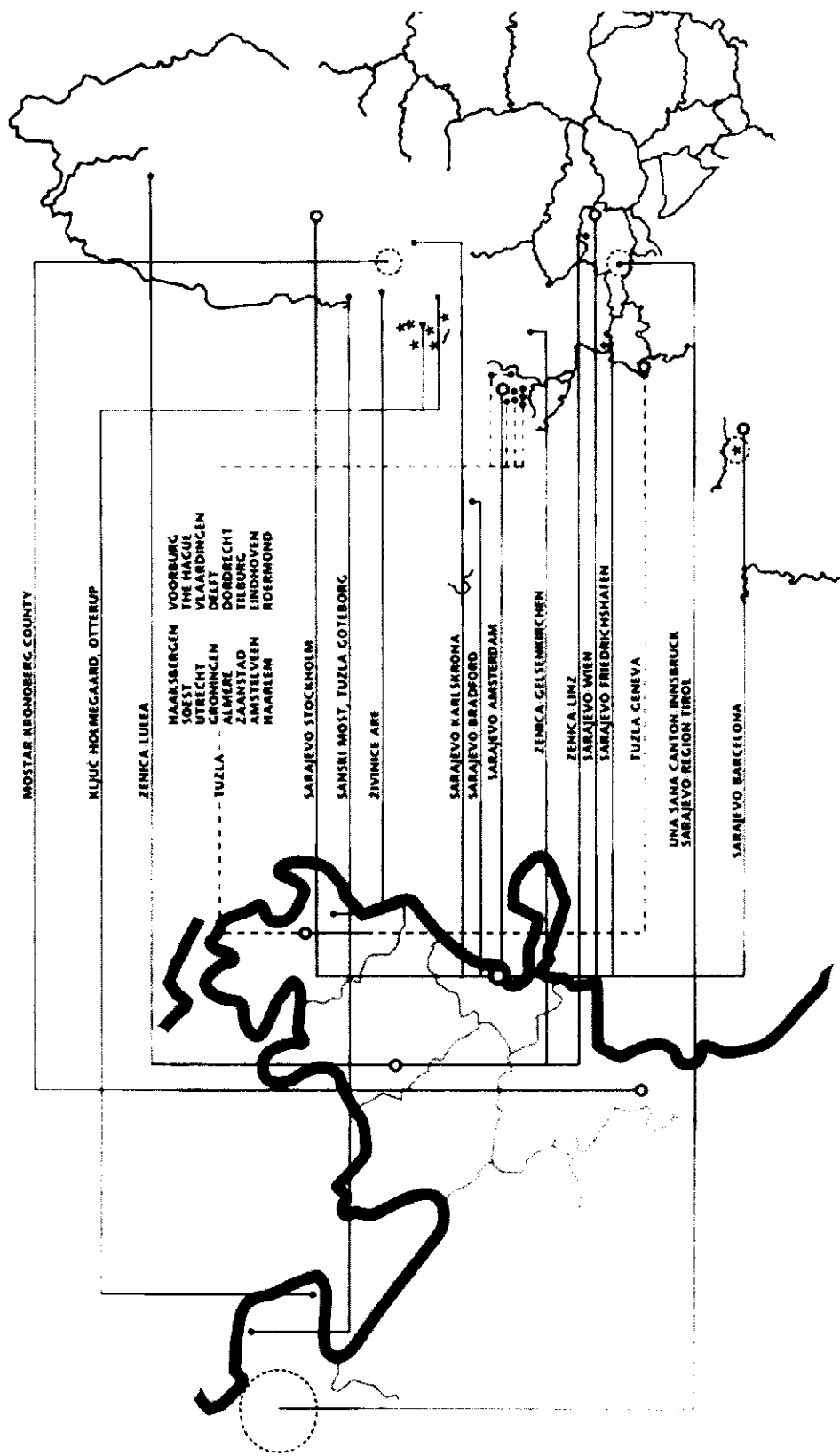
### **3.3. DC in Former Yugoslavia**

*"The reconstruction of civil society includes demobilisation, repatriation, employment opportunities and spirit of co-operation, as well some form of external support to reintegrate the economy create international links." (Hamid, El-Bushra, 1995)*

In addition to traditional co-operation agencies (UN system, NGOs, Bilateral Co-operation), many international informal associations, solidarity groups, structured institutions and local governments such as municipalities, provinces and regions have developed humanitarian activities in former Yugoslavia.

This huge archipelago of different organisations has represented an important part of the civil society coming from many different countries, above all from Europe. Sometimes, their approach appeared too spontaneous, unplanned and not strongly professional. But in spite of these limits, the informal solidarity has played a very interesting role in mobilising human and material resources at the grass root level from the "North" to the countries in need and building up solidarity among different people.

The effort has been huge and the magnitude of the support was important not only in distribution of humanitarian aid (and later on in the reconstruction and development initiatives) but in receiving the refugees, as well.



The first example of DC through WHO in former Yugoslavia was the *Hedip* project that was implemented in 1993 in Split, Croatia.

The experience of *Hedip*, a WHO DC programme in Split

Health and Development for Displaced Population (*Hedip*) programme, supported financially by the Italian Government and managed by WHO's Emergency Preparedness and Planning Unit faced displaced and host population's health problems through a comprehensive approach

*Hedip* undertook operational research in conflict areas (Central America, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and former Yugoslavia) to experiment with health and social interventions in order to promote reconciliation and development. The main *Hedip* strategies, following other programmes based on human development have been decentralisation, community participation, inter-institutional collaboration and multi-sectoral approach

In former Yugoslavia the program had a unique DC experience setting up a partnership between Split and Modena (Italian town) (See annex 3). This project produced a series of advantages regarding other ordinary activities from the world of volunteer work and solidarity and regarding the traditional bilateral or multilateral co-operation programs:

1. It aimed to remove the physical isolation, cultural, politic among populations and among institutions from former Yugoslavia caused by the armed conflict and the economic crisis, through the promotion of the international exchange favouring dialogue, reconciliation and peace
2. It combined public resources of co-operation from local institutions (Modena community) and the private (associations of solidarity, groups of base) in one unique co-operation program.
3. It mobilised competence and advanced experience in the social, health, cultural sectors (e.g. professionals from the Modena community, Local Health Unit, associations, etc.). Such local Italian resources are otherwise difficult to get involved in the activities of international co-operation.
4. It addressed the human resources and materials of the civil society within the structured project to guarantee a higher level of efficacy and efficiency of the contribution given by the world of solidarity.
5. It gave a major impetus to the sustainability and reproducibility of the activities without dependence upon public financing. The development of horizontal co-operation forged a brotherhood of the institutions and citizens of different cities that may assume autonomous forms and modalities in the future.

Since the Dayton agreement in BiH, DC has been engaged in development and reconciliation activities with the "human reconstruction" considered as a main priority.

Based on the need for a new approach that would cope with the post-war situation, two major experiences have been developed in BiH since 1997 with the involvement of WHO: Atlas and Mental health, elderly and vulnerable groups projects. (\*)

---

\* Some experiences with DC have been implemented by the Technical Units of WHO Euro, especially "Child Health and Development" and "Health Promotion and Investment for Health" Units.