

# CRISIS PLANNING AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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## Abstract

Public informing and participation in decision-making related to environmental protection as an important element of engaging stakeholders often excludes crisis planning. In environmental impact assessment procedures, there is often an organizational crisis involving three or four participants, normally the investor/applicant, the county office or ministry managing impact the assessment, the police overseeing the protests, and the judiciary as a result of rights given to the general and concerned public by the Aarhus Convention. Indications of a crisis appear some time before the situation threatens the organization or its partners, and consist of minor incidents that the organization has ignored or deemed insignificant for the final objectives. Unexpected crises bring uncertainty and risks – organizations cannot identify causes or consequences, all efforts are ineffective, while the threats to the entire project and the final objectives are increased. This paper analyses the differences in informing/participation of the general and concerned public in debates on decision-making in urban planning, and public debates on decision-making in environmental impact studies in the case of Lećevica Waste Management Center in Split-Dalmatia County. Methods for the collection of empirical data included problem-focused, in-depth interviews and participating observation. Grounded theory was used in analyzing the empirical material with initial, axial and selective coding. The frequency and absolute and relative cumulative value of coded responses were calculated using descriptive statistics. Results repeatedly showed shortcomings in adopting urban planning documents. Direct/indirect pressures from the politicians and the quiet administrative support or obstruction of administrative bodies are noticeable, including the changes in politics depending on the position of the ruling party/opposition at the state/local level.

**Keywords:** informing the public, public participation, crisis planning, waste management.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

An approach to crisis management based on complexity has an effect on the entire practice of the organization, since it emphasizes the unpredictable and unknown events that the organization would have to accept and respond to, as in the example of Weick's sense-making organization, which is an active participant in an unpredictable world instead of just passively responding to it [1]. Therefore, skills like improvisation, information gathering, and continuous reflective practice, awareness of the situation, risk assessment and problem solving are the key for the practice of effective crisis management. The rules for effective communication during a crisis are: begin with setting the goals of the crisis communication; develop since-

re relationships based on equality with relevant organizations and groups; the organization that manages the crisis must accept all participants as equal, including the media [2]. During the procedures of environmental impact assessments, an organizational crisis often occurs and that includes three or four organizations in the process: an investor or applicant, the competent county office or a ministry carrying out impact assessment of the planned activity on the environment, police departments that control the protests and the judiciary as a result of the rights of the general public and interested public by the Aarhus Convention. The first signs of a possible crisis appear a year or two before the crisis becomes a threat to the organization or its partners, and they consist of a single

incident or minor incidents that are ignored by the organizations and are estimated as not being able to exert a significant impact on achieving the final goal. The result generated by such unexpected crises is great uncertainty and increasing risks in which the organization cannot identify all the causes and possible final consequences, the efforts invested do not achieve the desired effects and the threat endangering the entire project and the achievement of the target objectives is increased. Possible differences in the information and participation of the general public are analyzed in this paper. Additionally, the authors address public debates among the general public regarding the decisions about spatial planning and public debates related to decision-making on environmental impact studies based on the case study of the Regional Waste Management Center Lećeveica in the Split-Dalmatia County.

### 1.1. Chronology of the case:

1. Defining the potential location for a waste management center is a very demanding and sensitive procedure. A study done by several authors in 2001 in order to provide further study of potential locations for a waste management center in Split-Dalmatia County has proposed three potential sites: Lećeveica, Opor and Otišić. The location in the municipality of Lećeveica was chosen as the best suited, since it meets all the natural, physical, economic and other criteria that can be established without conducting additional research.
2. By announcing the public inspection in April 2005 the implementation process of environmental impact assessment for the project "Regional Waste Management Center in the municipality of Lećeveica" began, while the county established a company to manage the Center, called the Regional Center for a Clean Environment Ltd.
3. The procedure was completed in November 2006, with the Decision on Environmental Acceptability adopted by the Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Construction.
4. Due to the complexity of resolving property and legal issues at the Lećeveica site and the alignment with the new regulations of the Waste Management Plan for the period of 2007-2015, the project activities were significantly slowed down so the documentation for the preliminary design was completed in 2012.
5. Rapid and complex activities on the project continued during 2015. The Ministry of Environment and Nature issued a Decision for the Planned Intervention in Lećeveica on the 18th of December 2015, for a total of six reloading stations (PS) in the Split-Dalmatia County: PS Kukuljovac, PS Zagvozđ, PS Karepovac, PS Vis, PS Stari Grad on Hvar, PS Brač in the Municipality of Pučišća. The Decision states that, upon the completion of the procedure related to the evaluation of the need for an environmental impact assessment procedure, neither is the environmental impact assessment required, nor is it necessary to carry out the main evaluation in order to determine whether the project is appropriate for an ecological network.
6. Location permits for all transfer stations were issued from January to March 2016 by the competent administrative department of the Split-Dalmatia County.
7. The assessment of whether an environmental impact assessment procedure was needed for the changes to the plan, requested by the Waste Management Center in Split-Dalmatia County for the site at Lećeveica, was launched in March 2016.
8. Contracts and documents on the establishment of the right to construct 6 transfer stations were signed April to October 2016.
9. All activities within the scope of the project carried out by Split-Dalmatia County / Regional Clean Environment Center Ltd. were conducted in cooperation with the Fund for

Environmental Protection, the Ministry responsible for environmental protection and JASPERS (Joint Assistance to Support Projects in the EU Regions: the European Commission, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development); the approval of JASPERS was obtained in October 2016.

10. On the 16th of November 2016, after the evaluation of the need for environmental impact assessment, the Ministry of Environment and Energy adopted a Decision by which the planned intervention does not require a new environmental impact assessment, but the environmental protection measures must be applied.
11. On the 21st of November 2016, the Ministry of Environment and Energy issued a Decision which terminated the Decision issued on the 16th of November 2016.

Current Status: In November of 2016, the Ministry of Environmental Protection canceled the previously issued positive opinion for the continuation of the project and the Split-Dalmatia County and the Regional Center for Clean Environment Ltd. was waiting for a new decision of the competent minister.

The conclusion of the analyzed case: The Lećeveca case was created as a result of solving the Karepovac case – an uncoordinated landfill for the municipal waste for the city of Split and other cities and municipalities in the Split-Dalmatia County that use Karepovac as their municipal waste disposal site. Baška Voda, Brela, Dugopolje, Kaštel, Klis, Lećeveca, Makarska, Marina, Muć, Okrug, Omiš, Podgora, Podstrana, Prgomet, Primorski Dolac, Seget, Solin, Tučepi. The result of all the events in the past fifteen years, since the problem of rehabilitating Karepovac and constructing a waste management plant has been in the spotlight, is that there is no visible progress on the rehabilitation of Karepovac, while in the last two years, however, significant progress was made in the implementa-

tion of the center in Lećeveca. The research for this paper was carried out during 2014 and in the early 2015, when in the available documents there was no sign that the communication plan for the center in Lećeveca was made, along with everything that it implied. In this case, the communication with the general public was the reason the whole process of environmental impact assessment was delayed, including the adoption of amendments to the spatial plan by the county of Split-Dalmatia, who had to predict the location of the center. Ecological organizations and the interested public used protests to interfere with the public debates, so the meetings of the expert committee had to take place in Zagreb instead of at the location of the site. In all these documents the compliance with spatial planning documents was highlighted, but the participation of the public has not been made clear and neither has the participation of the interested public in its creation. In the example of Lećeveca the same shortcomings were evident in creating valid documents (regulations, plans, strategies, etc.) as well as in their implementation, with clear deficiencies in the information and participation of the public and the interested public, education and preparation of all the stakeholders. Those deficiencies should have been eliminated or adjusted to the procedures before their execution, which then resulted in the extension of the project or it being put on hold. Although there are many objections to the communication with the public and public participation in the regulations, the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection did not include in the Strategic Plan for the period 2013 – 2015 as either general or specific objectives any improvements or enhancements to public relations and public participation in the prescribed processes. These include primarily early informing and involving the public in the decision-making of spatial plans and early informing and involving the public in the decision-making process regarding environmental protection. The analysis of studies in the case of Lećeveca indicates strong public engagement which opposed the realization of the project at the time when the public debates

on the environmental impact study were organized. The aim of this paper is to use the results of the empirical research to determine the relation between the information that the public received and their attitudes towards the extent to which the public was provided sufficient information during the process of adoption of spatial plans for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećevica. Based on the previously defined objective of the study, the general hypothesis (HG) is defined as follows: there are significant differences between the entities in the target and sector groups with regard to the awareness and attitudes to the extent the public debate provided enough information to the general public during the process of spatial plan adoption for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećevica, as well as regarding the future use of space and planned projects.

## 2. METHODS

The qualitative study was carried out using a purposive sample and the methods of in-depth interview and participant observation. The method of grounded theory was used in the analysis of the empirical material. Three basic types of coding were applied: open or initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The initial coding first included the rearranging and sorting of the data, noting similarities and forming response groups. Final analysis and categorization of the key concepts created the conceptual matrix with the content of qualitative empirical material in the integrated theoretical framework [8, 9]. Inductive and deductive methods were used on the data, as well as the methods of analysis and synthesis, comparison method, classification method, and the descriptive method [10]. The study was conducted in 2014. Respondent selection was done according to previously set criteria: a target sample of participants in the empirical study who are involved in the procedures relevant to the research either professionally or voluntarily [11]. The sample was defined with 100 entities, 46 males and 54 females. The average respondent age was 52.1 years. Res-

pondents were divided into 10 subsamples (target groups) which were qualitatively defined with 10 entities:

1. STUDY MAKERS – persons authorized by the Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection;
2. DEVELOPERS – investors;
3. MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT/COMMITTEE – representatives of the governing body conducting the process, and members of committees for study evaluation;
4. CITIES – representatives of the employees of the city administration for environmental protection responsible for conducting public debates, and spatial planning representatives;
5. COUNTIES – representatives of the employees of the county administration for environmental protection responsible for conducting public debates, and spatial planning representatives;
6. ASSOCIATIONS – representatives of non-governmental environmental associations;
7. CIVIL INITIATIVES – representatives of NGOs and the civil society who are involved in the process, but are not environmentally oriented;
8. ECONOMIC ASSOCIATIONS – representatives of the Croatian Employers' Association, Croatian Chamber of Commerce, and other economic interest associations;
9. POLITICAL PARTIES – representatives of political structures which are included in the process;
10. SCIENTISTS/JOURNALISTS – representatives of academic institutions and journalists who are involved in the process.

Three new qualitatively defined control groups (clusters) were classified based on the above subsamples:

1. PUBLIC SECTOR – 40 respondents from target groups: MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT/COMMITTEE, CITY, COUNTY, SCIENTISTS/JOURNALISTS;

2. CIVIL SECTOR – 30 respondents from target groups: ASSOCIATIONS, CIVIC INITIATIVES, POLITICAL PARTIES;
3. ECONOMIC SECTOR – 30 respondents from target groups: STUDY MAKERS, DEVELOPERS, ECONOMIC ASSOCIATIONS.

Research material consisted of two dependent (grouping) variables according to the criteria of the target group, the criteria of the control group, and one independent variable. The respondents were asked to state their opinion on whether there were differences between the public and the interested public in environmental impact assessment procedures. The responses related to the two independent variables were coded with a measuring scale from 1 to 3. We calculated the following descriptive parameters: frequency and cumulative relative values of the responses in the whole sample, and in the predetermined focus and control groups. Processing was carried out using the Statistica Ver.11.00 software suite [12].

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative processing of the variable entity matrix was based on the answers to the qualitatively defined question of the interview, which is: Do you think the public debates in the process of adopting spatial plans for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećeveca provided sufficient information to the public on the future use of the space and planned projects?

The subjects were asked to express their views and opinions on whether sufficient information on the future use of space and planned projects can be obtained only through public inspection into the process of adoption of spatial plans for the Lećeveca area in Split-Dalmatia County.

The answers given were defined at three levels. The first group classifies those entities that answered negatively and expressed the following views: no, the public was not adequately informed during the creation of the spatial plan of the Split-Dalmatia County about this location being the intended

site for the construction of the county waste management center. The whole procedure should have been clearer. It was emphasized that this was a possible location and not the final one, so that the plan could be passed more easily. Spatial plans were made by the politicians according to how it suited them; the public was not able to influence their decisions. They believed that the public was not fully informed about the procedure and the importance of making spatial plans, which is also the reason there has not been enough awareness regarding the importance of their reaction in the process of drafting and creating of the plan. They pointed out that the public inspection did not provide enough information because the public was not familiar enough with what the individual zones or marks in the plan meant. There has also been a lack of understanding and interpretation of the legend of the plan.

Quantitatively, these answers are coded as zero (0), for the upcoming statistical processing of the data.

Another group answered that it either did not know, was not sure, or it did not have an attitude and their opinion is the following: I'm not familiar enough with the topic, I believe that perhaps the public inspection should have been managed differently; I do not have enough information.

Quantitatively, these answers are coded as one (1) for the upcoming statistical processing of the data.

A third group of subjects was classified according to their affirmative answer and supported the following statement: yes, the public was adequately informed during the adoption of the spatial plan of the Split-Dalmatia County in relation to the planned county Waste Management Center in Lećeveca, the public debates were in accordance with the legal requirements, the procedure was fully respected and that was sufficient. However, the public is mostly uninterested when the spatial plan is initially being adopted and they react too late, when the environmental studies are already being initiated. They believed that the environmental organi-



zations and civil initiatives reacted too late, mostly after the plan has been adopted, and only at the level of the environmental impact studies, that they lacked the expertise and only got involved with the big projects, when it was necessary to stand against something. It is also unknown if they ever had any effect on the increase in the knowledge and understanding of the role of the public in the process of drafting and adopting spatial planning documents.

Quantitatively, these answers were coded as two (2) for the upcoming statistical processing of data.

The title for the answer in the statistical analysis has been defined with the variable carrying the code name public inspection Lećevice\_enough information.

Table 1 shows the results of how frequent all of the entities from the public inspection Lećevice\_enough information variable are.

**Table 1** The absolute and relative cumulative frequencies of public inspection Lećevice\_enough information, N = 100

Responses	Frequency	Cumulative relative frequency
0	57	57.00
1	3	60.00
2	40	100.00

Legend: 0 – no; 1 – I don't know, I'm not sure; 2 – yes.

In total, around 57% of subjects believe that the public was not adequately informed during public debates in the process of developing a regional plan of the Split-Dalmatia County for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećevice,

while 40% believe that such information was sufficient to act in accordance with regulations, but that the majority was not interested and joined in too late.

**Table 2** Frequency variable public inspection Lećevice\_enough information according to the target group, N = 100

Responses	SM	DE	ME	CI	CO	AS	CI	EA	PP	S/J	Total
0	6	3	6	2	1	9	9	7	8	6	57
1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
2	3	6	3	8	9	1	1	3	2	4	40

Legend: 0 – no; 1 – I don't know, I'm not sure; 2 – yes.

SM – STUDY MAKERS – persons authorized by the Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection;

DE – DEVELOPERS – investors;

ME – MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT/COMMITTEE – representatives of the governing body conducting the process, and members of committees for study evaluation;

CI – CITIES – representatives of the employees of the city administration for environmental protection responsible for conducting public debates and spatial planning representatives;

CO – COUNTIES – representatives of the employees of the county administration for environmental protection responsible for conducting public debates and spatial planning representatives;

AS – ASSOCIATIONS – representatives of non-governmental environmental associations;

CI – CIVIL INITIATIVES – representatives of NGOs and civil society who are involved in the process, but are not environmentally oriented;

EA – ECONOMIC ASSOCIATIONS – representatives of the Croatian Employers' Association, Croatian Chamber of Commerce, and other economic interest associations;

PP – POLITICAL PARTIES – representatives of political structures which are included in the process;

S/J – SCIENTISTS/JOURNALISTS – representatives of academic institutions and journalists who are involved in the process.

The analysis of Table 2 shows that the representatives of target groups are bipolar when it comes to their attitude on the variable public inspection Lećeveca\_enough information. Specifically, representatives of non-governmental organizations and civil society included in the proceedings (civil initiatives and associations) are completely positive that the public was not adequately informed during the public debates in the process of developing a regional plan of Split-Dalmatia County for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećeveca. Most of the representatives of the target groups CIVIL INITIATIVES, POLITICAL PARTIES, SCIENTISTS / JOURNALISTS, STUDY MAKERS and the MINISTRY OF

ENVIRONMENT / COMMISSION share the same mindset and attitudes while the representatives of the city and county environmental protection administration, responsible for conducting public debates, and representatives of regional planning (city and county) and representatives of the DEVELOPERS do not represent the views of the majority and believe that the public was adequately informed during the public debates in the process of developing a regional plan of the Split-Dalmatia county for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećeveca. Quantitative analysis of the frequency of variables public inspection Lećeveca\_enough information toward the sector group can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Frequency of the variable public inspection Lećeveca\_enough information according to the sector group, n = 100

Responses	PUBLIC SECTOR	CIVIL SECTOR	ECONOMIC SECTOR	Total
0	15	26	16	57
1	1	0	2	3
2	24	4	12	40
<b>total</b>	40	30	30	100

Legend: 0 – no; 1 – I don't know, I'm not sure; 2 – yes.

Public sector – MIN. OF THE ENVIRONMENT/COMMITTEE, CITY, COUNTY, SCIENTISTS/JOURNALISTS;

Civil sector – ASSOCIATIONS, CIVIC INITIATIVES, POLITICAL PARTIES;

Economic sector – STUDY MAKERS, DEVELOPERS, ECONOMIC ASSOCIATIONS.

60% of public sector representatives claimed that the public was adequately informed during the public debates in the process of developing a regional plan of the Split-Dalmatia County for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećeveca, while 97% representatives of the civil sector and 53% of the economic sector believed that the public was not adequately informed during the public debates in the process of developing a regional plan of the Split-Dalmatia county for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećeveca.

Based on the results of empirical research, the general hypothesis (HG) has been amended, which reads as follows: there are significant differences between the entities in the target and sec-

tor groups regarding the awareness and attitudes to the extent the public debate provided enough information to the general public in the process of adoption of spatial plans for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećeveca and on the future use of space and planned projects.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The research results show how divided the subjects are. In total, around 57% of subjects believe that the public was not adequately informed during the public debates in the process of developing a regional plan of the Split-Dalmatia County for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećeveca, while 40% of respondents believe that such infor-

mation was sufficient to act in accordance with regulations, but that the public majority showed disinterest and decided to join in late. The total of 60% of public sector representatives point out that the public was adequately informed during the public debates in the process of developing a regional plan of Split-Dalmatia County for the planned Waste Management Center in Lećevica, while 97% representatives of the civil sector and 53% of the economic sector hold an opposite opinion. The results pointed out the significant deficiencies in the adoption of spatial planning, and clearly showed direct/indirect pressure from the politicians, quiet administrative support or obstruction of the competent administration in the process, but also the effect of the changing political views, depending on the position of the ruling party and the opposition at the state and local level. Because of these problems, it is necessary to make additional efforts in informing the general public and the public participation during the process of adopting regional plans, in order to build trust among all stakeholders and reduce mistrust, which is often, because of the present issues, quite justified. In this sense, it is necessary, in the process of creating the spatial planning documentation by the local communities to also create a communication plan of how the public will be informed and participate, which will

be publicly available together with the documentation, with a clear agenda for the implementation and evaluation of the objectives in the process of informing and participation of the general public and the interested public. The responsibility for communication activities should be delegated to the public administration of the local community, and definitely not the economic sector, which has large interests related to the development projects that are being adopted. The civil sector should help the public and business sectors in addressing these problems with greater involvement in sensitizing the public to better understand the development of programs that are of interest to the local community. Due to the lack of transparency in the procedures of adopting spatial plans, the public expresses distrust in the decision makers and their motives. The local community often does not have sufficient expert capacity to improve information and participation of the public in procedures of adopting spatial plans, for which outsourcing can be used or volunteers/animators can be hired from the ranks of students and the civil sector. Their task should be to work on the projects and planning to raise public awareness on the importance of participation in making decisions on regional plans, about which the public should be informed more regularly.

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## PLANIRANJE ZA KRIZU I JAVNOST U ZAŠTITI OKOLIŠA

### Sažetak

Informiranje i sudjelovanje javnosti u donošenju odluka u zaštiti okoliša, kao važan dio procesa uključivanja dionika, nerijetko isključuje planiranje za krizu. U postupcima procjene utjecaja na okoliš često se pojavljuje organizacijska kriza koja uključuje tri ili četiri organizacije u postupku koje čine: investitor ili podnositelj zahtjeva, nadležni županijski ured ili ministarstvo koje vodi postupak procjene utjecaja planiranog zahvata na okoliš, policijske uprave koje kontroliraju prosvjede te pravosuđe kao rezultat prava javnosti i zainteresirane javnosti Arhuškom konvencijom. Prvi znakovi moguće krize pojavljuju se godinu-dvije prije no što kriza postane prijetnja organizaciji ili njenim partnerima, a čine ju pojedinačni ili manji incidenti koje su organizacije ignorirale i procijenile da nemaju veći značaj za postizanje konačnog cilja. Rezultat tako nastalih neočekivanih kriza su velika nesigurnost i rastući rizici u kojima organizacije ne mogu prepoznati sve uzroke ili konačne moguće posljedice, uloženi napori ne postižu efekte, a prijetnja ugrožavanja i postizanja cilj se povećava. U ovome su radu analizirane moguće razlike u informiranju i sudjelovanju javnosti i zainteresirane javnosti između javnih rasprava u donošenju odluka o prostornim planovima i javnih rasprava u donošenju odluka o studijama utjecaja na okoliš u slučaju Regionalnog centra za gospodarenje otpadom Lečevica u Splitsko-dalmatinskoj županiji. Metode prikupljanja empirijskog materijala su problemski usmjeren, dubinski intervju i sudjelujuće promatranje. U analizi empirijskog materijala korištena je utemeljena teorija s inicijalnim aksijalnim i selektivnim kodiranjem. Za izračunavanje učestalosti te apsolutne i relativne kumulativne vrijednosti svakog kodiranog odgovora korištena je deskriptivna statistika. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su istaknute nedostatke u donošenju dokumenata prostornog planiranja, a do izražaja dolaze direktni/indirektni pritisci političara, tiha administrativna podrška ili opstrukcija nadležnih upravnih tijela u postupku, ali i promjene političkih stavova, ovisno o položaju vladajućih i opozicije na državnoj i lokalnoj razini.

**Ključne riječi:** informiranje i sudjelovanje javnosti, planiranje za krizu, gospodarenje otpadom.

