'Managing' Consultancy?:
Charisma, Competence and Translation
in Transnational Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the nature of time-limited inputs from 'consultants', in international development projects, programmes and strategic support, exploring the relationship between charismatic and competence-based claims to expertise and authority in transnational consultancy encounters. The paper questions a rather limited and linear notion that external consultancy encourages a 'cut and paste' approach to policy transfer with a more nuanced understanding of processes of persuasion, intermediation, and translation. It explores the ways in which consultants are both 'managed' by others, and themselves 'manage' a wide range of relationships and activities, in terms of impressions and reputation. Through four case studies forming a critical reflexive ethnography based on the author's own consultancy experiences in South East Europe, the suggestion is that the management and ownership of consultancy processes is a complex, contested and discursive process, akin to a drama, in which situated encounters involving diverse actors and actants, play a much greater role than might be assumed. The implications for research moving beyond (auto)ethnography are also addressed.

A shepherd was herding his flock in a remote pasture when suddenly a brand-new BMW advanced out of the dust cloud towards him. The driver, a young man in a Broni suit, Gucci shoes, Ray Ban sunglasses and YSL tie, leaned out the window and asked the shepherd... "If I tell you exactly how many sheep you have in your flock, will you give me one?" The shepherd looked at the man, obviously a yuppie, then looked at his peacefully grazing flock and calmly answered "sure".

The yuppie parked his car, whipped out his IBM ThinkPad and connected it to a cell phone, then he surfed to a NASA page on the internet where he called up a GPS satellite navigation system, scanned the area, and then opened up a database and an Excel spreadsheet with complex formulas. He sent an email on his Blackberry and, after a few minutes, received a response. Finally, he prints out a 130-page report on his miniaturized printer then turns to the shepherd and says, "You have exactly 1586 sheep." "That is correct; take one of the sheep" said the shepherd. He watches the young man select one of the animals and bundle it into his car.

Then the shepherd says: "If I can tell you exactly what your business is, will you give me back my animal?", "OK, why not." answered the young man. "Clearly, you are a consultant." said the shepherd. "That's correct." says the yuppie, "but how did you guess that?" "No guessing required" answers the shepherd. "You turned up here although nobody called you. You want to get paid for an answer I already knew, to a question I never asked, and you don't know crap about my business... Now give me back my dog."
http://daveola.com/Resume/Joke.html (accessed 24 October 2011)

INTRODUCTION: Conceptualising Consultancy

The text above is one of the best known jokes regarding 'consultants' and their skills. Indeed, I first heard it when told by the co-owner of a UK-based consultancy company (CC) in a workshop in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The juxtaposition of 'expert knowledge' and 'common sense' which the story reveals, suggest that there is considerable 'work' involved in maintaining the legitimacy of consultancy. This paper starts from the observation that consultancy in general, and transnational development consultancy in particular, is always about 'management' in the widest sense, both in terms of being 'managed' by others, and in terms of the consultant her/himself 'managing' a wide range of relationships and activities. An emerging literature on transnational consultancy, much as a wider literature on international organisations, tends to see it as, either, all-powerful or, conversely, rather limited in power in the context of national and locally embedded social relations. Rendering consultancy contextual, conjunctural and paradoxical, may seem like a trivial endeavour. Nevertheless, studying consultancy forms as 'managed encounters' offers a rather privileged insight into the ways in which "abstract, mobile and dynamic" phenomena are "articulated in specific situations – or territorialized in *assemblages*", thereby defining "new material, collective and discursive relationships" (Collier and Ong, 2005; 4, emphasis in original).

One part of this concerns the relationship between 'charismatic' and 'competence-based' claims to expertise and authority in transnational consultancy encounters. There is a need to explore the remaking of Weber's classic three types of authority (Weber, 1958) – traditional; charismatic; and rational-legal – in the context of transnational encounters in which contradictory, contested and competing understandings of 'legitimacy to act' may be in place. The pervasiveness of 'everyday experiments' in the context of both "the changing role of tradition" and "the displacement and reappropriation of expertise, under the impact of the intrusiveness of abstract systems" (Giddens, 1994; 58-59) is found most acutely in transnational consultancy, as a site of the exercise of agency in emerging and flexible spaces of governance, authority, and rule. The emphasis on 'the consultant' as a catalyst for

'reform' or, sometimes even more abstractly, 'change', in settings where the consultant is, more or less, 'foreign', suggests the need to explore 'translation practices' as meanings are constantly being transformed, modified, negotiated, distorted, resisted and co-opted (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007; Latour, 2005).

The approach adopted here borrows significantly from critical ethnographies on 'international development', as well as from narrative and dramaturgical perspectives on 'management consultancy' and on 'organisational change'. The first of these focuses on 'how' international development works, situating development 'projects' and 'programmes' in the context of social, political and economic relations and power inbalances between 'donors', 'implementing agencies', 'recipients' and 'intermediary' actors and agencies. Distrustful of both instrumental views of development as „rational problem solving" as well as more critical perspectives revealing „hidden power relations", Mosse and others have sought to explore, in the 'black box' of lived encounters, „the complexity of policy making and its relationship to project practice" as well as the „creativity and skill involved in negotiating development" (Mosse, 2005; 2). For development workers, their professional identity necessarily involves the rather complex work of recovering „the universal from the particular" and „technocratic knowledge from the illicit relationships upon which it is built" (Mosse, 2011a; 57). Mosse's latest collection (Mosse, ed, 2011), explores how and why, in the Alice in Wonderland world of Aidland (Apthorpe, 2011), the 'travelling orthodoxies' (Mosse, 2011b) of international development professionals are held onto resolutely despite, or perhaps because of, their extreme fragility.

The exponential increase in the use of, and significance of, management consultancy in the last twenty five years is closely linked to processes of flexibilisation and a sense of greater uncertainty for managers within organisations. The basis for choosing, managing and then evaluating the work of management consultants is, therefore, inherently risky and unstable (cf. Clark, 1995). The importance of the active management of the client-consultant relationship, sometimes seen as akin to the art of 'impression management', has been studied in terms of theatrical analogies or dramaturgical metaphors (Clark, 1995; 18), as a sub-set of a wider narrative approach to organisations (cf. Czarniawska, 1997). The importance of managing 'back-stage' and 'front-stage' activities of consultancies (Goffman, 1959), in a context of a kind of 'expanded theatricality' of performance, suggests the need for an exploration of diverse modes of control in terms of different relationships between 'acts' or 'action' (what happened?), 'scenes' or 'settings' (where and when?), and 'actors' (who?) (Czarniawska, 1997; 39; Boje et al, 2001; 132). Whilst actors tend to follow scripts, whether primarily framed in terms of pursuing situational, personal, or strategic goals, improvisation is also a critical part of any performance (Mangham, 1978; 28).

Clark has argued that „consultancy work is one of the most intangible parts of the services sector" (Clark, 1995; 110), with clients forced to judge the quality of services primarily „in terms of perceptions that result from their interaction with consultants" (ibid; 111). In this sense, transnational consultancy encounters are even more intangible, in the context of complex processes of translation involving the transpostion of actors, acts and settings to different and, to an extent, unfamiliar, settings. 'Performance in translation' can come to resemble more of a 'contact zone' involving „the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (Pratt, 1992; 6). With echoes of Homi Bhabha's concept of an

emergent 'third-space', a liminal or in-between space 'at the cutting edge of translation and negotiation' (Bhabha, 1996), marked more by 'forces' and 'directions' than by 'forms' or 'dimensions' (Bhabha, 1995), 'contact zones' are 'interactive' and 'improvisational', within „radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 1992; 6-7), tending towards „ a power-charged set of exchanges" (Clifford, 1997; 192). The mobility of consultancy is not, therefore, any guarantor of an equivalent mobility of 'policy', 'reform', or 'change'.

The complexities of the relationship between organisational change, transnational consultancy, and types of 'new public management' as a set of nested organisational practices usually associated with broader 'neo-liberal' restructurings (cf. Connell et al, 2009; Vabø, 2009), whilst crucial, are not the central focus of this study[2]. The complex, innovative, and contingent nature of the introduction of business practices into the management of human services, involving a multiplication of „the agencies and sites" of governance (Clarke, 2004; 119), can more usefully be viewed as an unfinished process requiring a kind of reform 'hyperactivity' (Dunleavy, 1995), rather than as the unfettered and irresistible *denouement* of a logic of 'neo-liberalism'. Consultancy is both a product of, and contributes to, reforms based on „contracting, competition and collaboration" (Clarke, 2004; 119) but, here, the emphasis is on the paradoxes, tensions and contradictions which this involves, rather than seeing consultants as transmitters of a unified ideology. It is not enough to caricature the 'men in expensive suits from the World Bank and the IMF' armed with 'neoliberal economic theory', counselling governments using 'prepared modes of argumentation' (Haney, 2000; 51). Even Haney acknowledges that a globalized 'discourse of need', whose goal is to 'homegenize welfare systems' „had to be indiginized and planted in local soil as it traveled" (ibid; 52). My concern here is not to prejudge and reify in this way, but, rather, to look at the complex 'work' which consultants have to undertake and the real possibilities of resistance, reaction, and recalibration of an already much more hybrid and contradictory set of discourses and goals.

This text revisits material presented earlier on transnational international development consultancy assignments in which the author was directly involved (cf. Stubbs, 2002; Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007; Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009). Four different consultancy experiences are presented here within a kind of 'extended critical reflexive ethnography'[3]. It is an ethnography, like Mosse's, in which I am myself the principal informant, offering a personal analytical account, as a participant-insider, based on research which is „complex, long-term, multi-sited and initially unintentional" (Mosse, 2005; ix). The inevitable focus on self as actor is meant to draw out the complexities of the consultancy form and the nature of lived encounters, rather than to reduce these to crude images of the consultant self as either

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[2] Neo-liberal restructurings can be said to relate to „the project of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market" and „the institutional arrangements to implement this project" (Connell et al, 2009; 331). New Public Management (NPM) usually refers to public sector reforms „in line with ideas taken from private business and economic theories derived from modelling private business". NPM is „born of a technocratic model" and „driven by the demand for enhanced efficiency and accountability" (Vabø, 2009; 1). I share, however, John Clarke's concern that the question of what might be meant by 'neo-liberalism' and, by extension, NPM, is „difficult" (Clarke, 2008; 136), not least because „the processes and practices of insertion" into 'global neo-liberalism' are „complicated, multiple, hesitant and ambiguous" as a result of (more or less) „uncomfortable encounters with 'local' politics and cultures ... that are (also) mobile and connective" (ibid; 138, my addition).

[3] Denzin's call for "reflexive critical ethnography" (Denzin, 2003; 268), rightly dismissive of the „confessional reflexivity" of much 'autoethnography' (ibid; 269), is influenced by Burawoy's exposition of the 'four moments' of the 'extended case method': „extending from observer to participant, extending observations over time, extending from process to external forces, and extending theory" (Burawoy, 2000; 28).

'lone hero' or 'lone victim'. It is, itself, of course, a particularly purposeful, but by no means objective, re-assembling, itself akin to a work of translation, in which it is acknowledged that „the range of things we can know first hand … is extremely narrow" (Gould, 2004; 283). Attempting an evocative presentation of consultancy „from the inside" (Willis and Trondman, 2000; 7), in which the ethnographer is „located within the terrain that she is mapping" (Marcus, 1995) is only one form of re-assemblage, of course, offering a highly privileged and, inevitably *post hoc*, reading of events as they unfolded, often many years ago.

FOUR CASES

Case One: Naive (Native) Transgressions

A casual conversation on the Croatian coast in the summer of 1998 led to one of my first, and most painful, consultancy experiences. A UNDP Programme Manager in Bosnia-Herzegovina (B-H) was about to commission an evaluation of a number of area-based development (ABD) programmes within his portfolio, linked to issues of their contribution to peace-building and to gender-awareness. Together with a close friend, formerly head of one of these programmes in the city of Travnik (cf. Peirce and Stubbs, 2000), we lamented how evaluations were often undertaken by foreign consultants with little or no direct knowledge of the country or context. Our solution was to form a team of three persons, all linked with the Croatian Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), The Centre for Peace Studies, a part of the Anti-War Campaign, Croatia network, which bid for, and subsequently won, the contract. Myself as Team Leader and ABD specialist was joined by two colleagues from Croatia as, respectively, Peace Building and Gender specialists. Whilst none of us were experienced in consultancies of this nature, we had a strong track record of anti-war activism and of supporting like-minded groups and individuals in B-H. In the end, the terms of reference called for a 'comparative assessment' of the approaches in a number of diverse programmes, with a mandate to make a series of recommendations to UNDP. The study, when completed, was meant to form part of a global study of UN contributions to peace building through ABD in post-conflict environments.

Throughout our work in B-H, we were joined by the new Programme Manager (the previous Programme Manager had not had his contract renewed), on the grounds that this would enable him to gain a rapid understanding of his new portfolio. Three 'moments from the road' perhaps best reflect the lack of a shared approach between him and us, and the consequent struggle for authority around ideas of 'competence', 'skill' and 'knowledge'. His comment, on being driven through a region which he had never previously set foot in, that "what this place needs is a rural development programme" was greeted with incredulity by us. At the same time, his attempt to engage me in questions on ABD as a UNDP approach, to which I replied "I am not really an ABD specialist as such, for me it's really all about community work", had a similar impact on him. Towards the end of the first week, he approached me expressing concerns about the performance of one of the team members, the peace building specialist, who he saw as not engaging adequately in the assignment. I replied that the person's style might not fit the typical consultant, but that his manner of building relationships and practising 'active listening' made him a crucial part of the team.

Of the three programmes to be evaluated, only one, directly linked to UNDP, offered full co-operation. Another programme, run through the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and with funding from the Government of Italy, allowed for general programmatic discussions but not access to their work on the ground. We later learnt that they had complained about the terms of reference on the grounds that UNDP had no direct authority over their work. The new head of the Travnik project, seeking to steer the project away from its grassroots and voluntary work origins, also questioned the legitimacy of an evaluation carried out by people with strong personal links with the previous head of the project and where one of us, myself, had been paid within the project to supervise a participatory evaluation (cf. Engberg and Stubbs, 1999). Consenting to an interview, he commented afterwards how it had been more like a conversation, and that he had expected a more structured set of questions.

A feedback session to staff from all the projects, at the end of our two weeks in B-H, also led to considerable criticism of us for being rather vague and not offering very clear typologies against which to assess the different projects and their implementation methodologies. The gap in understanding of the task between the team and those present seemed to revolve both around the way of conducting such an evaluation, as well as the importance of political as against technical criteria within the projects. Underpinning this was UNDP staff's faith in the possibility of transferring tried and tested approaches from elsewhere, and our own insistence on the particularity of B-H.

The draft final report, compiled by the whole team, was rejected by UNDP. They took particular offence at three comments that we had included in the report, all seeking to show the insensitivity and lack of understanding of the context by UNDP. The first related to the fact that we observed, in one event in Sarajevo, that the UNDP Resident Representative introduced the Mayor of Sarajevo, rather than the other way round. Secondly, we criticised project documents which included such phrases as "when the war came to Bosnia-Herzegovina" suggesting that this served to render war and violent conflict as equivalent to a natural disaster and served to depoliticise any understanding of the causes of war, and hence to treat all so-called 'ex-warring factions' as equals. Finally, we criticised in the strongest possible terms the ways in which sites of projects had large signs with the logos of international agencies on them, together with the name of the project in English but not in the languages of B-H. Eventually, I was asked to work on a revision, now called 'an appreciation', along with the Project Manager and the Deputy Resident Representative who had recruited him. This turned the document into a rather bland text, albeit with some academic merit. Working in this way ensured that the team got paid, no small matter for struggling activists and a nascent local NGO, although the text was never, to my knowledge, used within the UN system as had originally been planned.

Case Two: (Deniable) Pilot Error

My most extensive consultancy engagement relates to DFID's work on the reform of social welfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina (B-H), including intermittent involvement, between 1999 and 2006, on scoping, designing, implementing, and assessing the wider impact of a project known as "Reforming the Systems and Structures of Central and Local Social Policy Regimes" (RSSSP). I was directly recruited to work, alone, on what DFID call a 'Scoping Mission',

essentially an initial assessment based on a broad project idea, at short notice, because the DFID staffer originally meant to do the work was overwhelmed with issues relating to the crisis in Kosovo. I had a track-record on issues of social protection in B-H, having co-organised the first post-war conference on the future of social protection (Gregson and Stubbs (eds.), 1998) and having worked on designing a smaller-scale project on a similar basis for the Government of Finland, which was implemented by the B-H based and locally-led Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues (IBHI). My combination of knowledge and contacts meant that I was able to undertake the work for the Scoping Mission with little difficulty, drawing the respective entity governments[4], and other key actors, into discussions regarding the possible location of 'pilot' municipalities to be chosen to promote new partnerships between statutory Centres for Social Work and local NGOs.

A strong connection built up, in this phase, with DFID's London-based Social Policy Advisor, was important, as he praised the report, acknowledging the 'added value' over most consultancies through my prior engagement with, and knowledge of, the sector, not least in sidestepping opposition from sections of the British Embassy in Sarajevo, who suggested that, after 45 days work, I had managed to find only 'vague' ideas for a project. The subsequent project design phase, working with another, more experienced, UK-based consultant brought in as Team Leader, also proceeded relatively smoothly, particularly after allaying some of the fears of the British Ambassador ("How would I go about explaining this project on the radio?"). The two of us worked well together, with contrasting styles and complementary skills, with myself willing and able to engage local NGOs sceptical of the project and able to improvise in key local stakeholder workshops (very much a 'front-stage' activity) and the Team Leader skilled in more diplomatic discussions and in the mysteries of project design using logical framework analysis[5].

The project, as designed, was extremely complicated, with attempts made to link local level pilot reforms with entity level policy change. It required real 'buy in' from actors on the ground many of whom were more interested in the instrumental rewards of project participation, and well skilled in manoeuvring within a highly 'projectised' environment. At the same time, it introduced, in retrospect, far too many additional analytical inputs regarding the situation on the ground. Two important aspects of the project design never actually materialised. One concerned the direct linkage to a World Bank-led reform process at central and entity-levels, which became so delayed as to no longer synchronise with the time-scale of the RSSSP. The second idea, for DFID to directly fund a Social Policy Advisor, based in B-H, to oversee the project, was also dropped after the initial appointee withdrew for health reasons. This left supervision to local embassy staff and to the London-based Advisor. Whilst I had explored the possibility of alternative modalities, DFID's rules meant that the project, planned to last 3 years and cost 4m. GBP, would be subject to competitive tender. However, it was made clear that the bidder most likely to receive the contract would be one which had secured the active involvement of IBHI as a central actor in the project.

IBHI joined a consortium led by Birks Sinclair and Associates Limited (BSAL) a UK-based for-profit CC which, earlier, had been the main (or Framework) contractor for the EU

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[4] Under the terms of the Dayton Peace Agreement, B-H has a very weak central state structure with most power invested in the respective entities, the Federation of B-H and *Republika Srpska.*
[5] For a detailed elaboration of 'log frames' as a form of technocratic and managerialist control within international development, see Gasper (no date).

CONSENSUS programme in Eastern Europe[6]. In large part because of IBHI's involvement, I was one of those named within the BSAL bid, for an unspecified role. It was only after a number of consultants involved in the initial phase of mapping municipal capacities, nearly all British and with a long history of work with BSAL, either fell sick or complained of the extensive travelling involved, that BSAL approached me to work on the assessment in the two municipalities in *Republika Srpska* (RS). I later learnt that both key figures in IBHI and DFID had pushed for my involvement and that senior BSAL figures had agreed, in part, because having chosen the pilot sites, it would be good for me to experience first-hand the logistical difficulties involved.

Disagreements between myself and BSAL consultants and, indeed, one of the co-owners of the company, grew exponentially over time. In summary, my concerns related to their valuing of international, mainly British men of a certain age and background, at the expense of local, expertise; their denial of the sensitivity and particularity of the B-H context; and their tendency to adhere strictly to the wording of the project terms of reference rather than to take risks, which meant that their written reports, whilst extensive and glossy, were often rather light on analytical content. These disagreements culminated prior to, and during, a 'stakeholder workshop' in Trebinje in RS, where I complained about the heavy presence of foreigners in what was a rather complex political environment, suggesting sarcastically, in an email, that if we all decided not to claim our daily allowances, a more substantial social protection system could be established. My mood was not helped by the presence of BSAL's 'grants man' who came fresh from what BSAL saw as a very similar project in Bulgaria, with a pre-conceived framework which judged one 'umbrella' NGO in Trebinje as ideal, largely because of the persuasive English language skills of its founder, who had succeeded in attracting international donor funds, but had little local credibility.

By mutual agreement, I took no further part in the project after I had completed the municipal studies, but was surprised, after the project ended, to be asked by DFID to be involved, with a colleague, in what they described as an 'independent' Social Policy Impact Assessment, looking at the RSSSP and another project on statistical systems for labour and social policy, also implemented by BSAL and IBHI. The focus was not on direct project evaluation but on the projects' contribution to social policy change, assessing stakeholder ownership, programme sustainability, partnership working, dissemination of best practice, the impact of governance structures, and issues of transparency, accountability and public participation. The summary report (Maglajlić and Stubbs, 2006), presented at a conference held in Sarajevo in 2006, suggested that longer time frames may be needed to create "long-lasting, efficient, and effective policy changes" (ibid; 8). It also noted:

"... such long-term, flexible, multi-level projects ... require a "new generation" of implementers willing to be flexible, to go beyond the ToRs, identify agents and coalitions for change, and continually reflect upon the implications of an analysis of local political economies" (Maglajlić and Stubbs, 2006); 7).

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[6] The issue of the role of consultancy companies in social policy, using the CONSENSUS programme as a case study, was raised in a paper by two of my colleagues associated with the Globalism and Social Policy Programme (de la Porte and Deacon, 2002). BSAL had declined to be interviewed for the study which quoted a CONSENSUS official as seeing them as 'body shoppers' who "knew the requirements for making good technical and financial proposals, but once awarded the contract, were not particularly interested in the project" (ibid; 57).

Over time, a number of very different analyses of the RSSSP and other similar projects in B-H have been published, together with a range of reflections on the experience. One text (Maglajlić Holiček and Rašidagić, 2007) links the Government of Finland and DFID projects, noting that the project documents were "written by the same (international) consultant" (ibid; 159), suggesting that 'pilots' were never scaled up and that ministry officials and others, rewarded handsomely for their participation, in a personal capacity, in *ad hoc* governance structures, never followed through on any of the policy suggestions that were made. My own analysis borrowed heavily from this, suggesting that:

"The space left by the absence of macro-level reform has been occupied by micro-level 'pilots', involving partnerships between a range of donors, international and local NGOs, local professionals, consultancy companies, academics, and politicians which operate on the border between the formal and the informal, the public and the private, and which serve to create uneven, contradictory and, above all, unsustainable localised practices" (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009; 684).

Others have suggested that IBHI as a 'local intermediary' ensured "the acceptance of the project by local stakeholders and greatly increased the efficiency of the foreign consultants, in turn strengthening partnership with local stakeholders, as well as local ownership and sustainability" (Ninković and Papić, 2007; 8). Quoting from a participatory evaluation undertaken within the project itself[7], they note the sustainability of "knowledge; experience; the ethos of partnership; and an awareness of the needs of marginalised people" (ibid; 13). The equal involvement of BSAL and IBHI, a prime example of 'local demand driven' project implementation, is suggested as a model for other Balkan and South East European countries.

This was my last consultancy for DFID in B-H (the new Social Development Advisor who had commissioned the assessment worked with me subsequently on a number of evaluations of a joint DFID-World Bank project in Kosovo) but, through other consultancy and research opportunities, I have been able to trace the move from 'projects' to 'strategies' which prefigured similar moves elsewhere in the region. Extensive external consultancy support is now mainly directed to a newly created, rather flexible, donor-driven central state agency whose informal power shrank when one of its leading local initiators moved elsewhere, but which remains the site of rather chaotic 'capacity building' by a number of international organisations (Stubbs, 2010).

Case Three: Crowding (Out) Change

My most concentrated consultancy assignment lasted a total of 107 days, over one year from April 2002, in Croatia, working on a 'Social Protection Reform Project' (SPP). The project was designed in an extremely complex way, with no less than 9 consultancy teams or individuals working for the Government of Croatia, supported by DFID and the World Bank. Whilst the other 8 teams[8] were recruited through competitive tender, on World Bank

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[7] The BSAL website to which the article refers the reader is no longer functional.

[8] These included a Team Leader (British male from a UK University consultancy unit); a Social Assistance Team (one British woman with an international CC); a Fiscal and Decentralisation team (a large team led by a Ukrainian woman from a private CC, including Croatian members); an Admin/IT/Database team (led by a UK man from an international CC); a Labour and Employment Team (one Croatian man working in a research institute); a Poverty Monitoring team (all Croatian academics, under the umbrella of a Croatian research institute), a Capacity Strengthening team (two men, on from the UK and one

contracts, I was directly recruited, together with my colleague from the B-H project design, by DFID's Social Policy Advisor noted above. The context for the initiative was set by the reform-minded centre-left government which had come to power in Croatia in 2000 and, in particular, the appointment of a young Lecturer in Social Work from the University of Zagreb as Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, identified by all parties to the project as an 'agent of change'. He supervised the entire project, with the support of an Inter-agency Steering Committee and an operational Implementing Committee.

Perhaps inevitably in such a complex configuration, and with a Team Leader perceived by many involved to be rather weak[9], the teams tended to pursue their own agendas rather than work together, with the Assistant Minister oscillating between promoting ideas of 'radical' change, often without the support of key civil servants, and focusing on quality control and deliverables. The Admin/IT/Database team was removed from the project about halfway through and the Team Leader was also removed near the end, after the second of two participatory workshops, involving a sharing of reform ideas with all stakeholders. The emphasis on quality control seemed to involve more the submitting of well laid-out reports on time and, above all, responding well to discussions through rapidly produced power point presentations than any judgement regarding content and applicability.

Our own work, whilst generally perceived to be of good quality, struggled to be given a central place in the reform agenda. In part, this related to the strong informal networks which could be mobilised by the Fiscal Decentralisation team, having previously worked on USAID projects with the Ministry of Finance, and, through the presence of a key Croatian-US intermediary who had been involved in a number of controversial privatisations, and who had strong connections to the project administrator. In the second workshop, our presentation included a discussion on how to move away from a very statist social welfare system to a mixed model with a greater role for NGOs. I made the point that the system cost some 2.4 billion Croatian Kuna (HRK) (about €300 m.) and that, even to ensure that NGOs were 10% of the system would, therefore, cost some 240 m. (HRK) or €30 m. In small group discussions we were attacked by a senior official from the Ministry of Finance who labelled us as "crazy social spenders" wanting to spend more on social welfare at a time of budget restraint. In contrast, at the same workshop, the Fiscal Decentralisation team concentrated on the need to introduce market mechanisms into all aspects of the system. Any subsequent criticisms we made of the team's work led to quick responses, with the team leader always alerted to problems by the administrator of the project.

Over time, we built up trust and strong collaboration with a Croatian social policy scholar who ensured that a shortened version of our final report, translated into Croatian, was published in the Croatian Journal of Social Policy so that it could be read by a wider audience and stand as some kind of marker for future reform efforts (Stubbs and Warwick, 2003). We also consulted with three other Croatian social policy experts all of whom had involvement in social policy reform inside and outside the country. Whilst supportive of our agenda on deinstitutionalisation and the promotion of community-based social services, this group tended to favour solutions which involved radical change to the role of state Centres for

from the USA, supervising, respectively, the Labour and Employment and Poverty Monitoring teams; and a Local Resources Team (all Croatian, mainly social policy academics as well as a project administrator under the umbrella of a Croatian CC).
[9] A long and rather boring lecture, in one of the first meetings of all the teams, on the logical framework approach was judged by most of those present to be uneccesarry, irrelevant, or both.

Social Work, or even their abolition. Following discussions between the key actors, responsibility for the writing of the Synthesis Report for the project was vested in the Fiscal and Decentralisation team, with my own concerns, to DFID staff, that the team leader was too 'neo-liberal', given short shrift. In the end, the Synthesis Report was a fair representation of our work but, in the context of upcoming elections, work on system reform was put on hold.

The Assistant Minister survived the change of power, becoming Deputy Minister, through a link with a minor coalition partner, in the new health-dominated Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. His influence was reduced in the context of an emphasis by the Minister on using the subsequent World Bank loan primarily for repairs to institutions, combined with piloting of social welfare reforms in three counties all controlled by the ruling party. New foreign consultants came and went, working with a member of the main coalition party who was given the role of co-ordinating the reforms. After the resignation of the Deputy Minister, and his replacement by a career politician from the same coalition partner, the EU found a credible and understanding interlocutor for the process of drawing up, implementing and monitoring the Joint Inclusion Memorandum[10] which has, in many ways, set out a more credible and progressive agenda for change (Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2009, 2010).

Case Four: (Self) Governing Commitment

One of my most recent consultancy assignments, between January and June 2011, involved work with UNDP and the Government of Albania on promoting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). I had previously worked with UNDP in Albania on a One-UN initiative on Social Inclusion, as well as providing inputs for a National Human Development Report. On a previous visit to Tirana I had discussed with the Resident Representative the importance of the issue of CSR and the possibilities of creating stronger links between UNDP and the Business Sector. Later, when the Government of Albania's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy (METE) approached UNDP for support in developing a CSR strategy, in response to EU concerns at the lack of such a strategy, an assignment was developed combining this with work on reinvigorating the Global Compact (GC) initiative[11] in Albania through the creation of a new multi-stakeholder forum on CSR, as well as advice to UNDP on options for their future programming on this issue.

My main counterpart in UNDP was a young Programme Officer who had taken over the GC responsibility alongside her main work on a project on youth employment. My first visit to Tirana came in the tense aftermath of anti-Government protests which had ended in the deaths of three protesters. Nevertheless, all meetings went ahead as scheduled, with a key meeting on the first day, with the Head of the Department of Competitiveness in the METE, also attended by a senior UNDP Cluster Manager. It was quite clear from this meeting that the Ministry did not have a clear idea of what they wanted but were looking for a general policy paper underpinned by examples of good practice, and containing some specific recommendations and a concrete Action Plan so that they could profile themselves more clearly in terms of CSR.

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[10] I continue to work for the European Commission as an independent expert on social inclusion helping them monitor the JIM process and follow-up.

[11] http://www.unglobalcompact.org/

Throughout a number of meetings, mainly with companies in Albania as well as with some key intermediary organisations, it was clear that, whilst there had been a number of CSR 'projects' in Albania, these had never achieved any sustainability after the project ended. Over time, I came to realise the importance of presenting a rather basic strategy, along the lines of a similar initiative in Macedonia (Macedonia, 2008), but combined with a targeting of particular sectors. Through discussions, these were refined to be tourism, construction, and export-based activities. In discussions with senior UNDP staff, I suggested that there might be a point, given the level of Government commitment, in tying both the re-invigoration of the GC, and the CSR strategy to a new project. I also made clear that, whilst willing to draw up a very broad concept note, I would not be available for further work on that project.

As agreed, I sent, on time, a draft CSR Policy Paper, written in the name of the Government of Albania, combining broad CSR commitments in an EU context with a number of initiatives, most of which involved establishing working groups to pursue CSR initiatives, such as incentives for cleaner production, as well as an annual CSR award. Having made UNDP staff aware of the Macedonia report, I strove not to 'cut and paste' from that but, generally, to pitch the report at the same or similar level of abstraction. After a considerable length of time, the METE counterpart responded with some minor remarks on the report, as well as asking for a list of indicators on CSR performance which I added as an Annex to the report.

I returned to Albania in April 2011 for a short visit, the purpose of which was to meet with the METE, to present the draft report, and facilitate discussion, at a workshop held under the auspices of the Global Compact, and to discuss next steps with UNDP. There was considerable uncertainty as to whether the visit would go ahead, mainly relating to the anxiety of the UNDP Cluster Manager that too few people would attend the workshop. This was compounded, at the last minute, by news that the METE counterpart would have to attend a meeting in Brussels that day, and that his Deputy would, therefore, attend and introduce the workshop. In a meeting with them upon arrival in Tirana, they expressed concern that the draft Policy paper was not specific enough and that they required more detailed guidance and concrete recommendations. I replied that I was, of course, willing to redraft the report and provide more examples of good practice from the region and beyond but that there was a limit as to how specific I could be operating virtually 'in the dark' of what the Government intended. I also made it clear that although there was probably scope for UNDP extending the assignment I did not have time for this.

In discussions with UNDP staff I was, I think, able to convince them that the report was of good quality and that there were real dangers of going further without clear ownership of the process by the Government and greater direction. In the end, the workshop was seen as highly successful with a large attendance, and an animated discussion which, itself, seemed to reinvigorate the GC. The workshop, and my power point presentation, were placed on UNDP's website. I discussed, before leaving, the options for UNDP and then, by the agreed deadline, delivered a revised Policy Paper as well as short texts on the terms of reference for a multi-stakeholder forum, and options for UNDP programming in the future. I also shared the Policy Paper with a number of policy oriented scholars of CSR who provided very positive feedback. Feedback from UNDP was also positive and the assignment ended. I was, however, recently contacted to ask if I would return to host the first meeting of the multi-stakeholder forum. In reply to an email where I asked whether the METE had done anything,

I was told no although "this time however METE seems more committed, but I think you really were a great moderator the last time. So, please don't say no."

ANALYSIS: Paradoxes of performance and persuasion

Analysing some of the continuities and discontinuities of the four case studies is important beyond the personal dimension of a trajectory from naivety in the first case to a more self-referential presentation of competence in the last case study. What is clear is that the management of consultancy is far from a straightforward and linear process in which there is a single client-consultant relationship. In all the cases above, the importance of managing a series of relationships and networks is critical. Even utilising dramaturgical metaphors, it is clear that consultants act in front of multiple, active, audiences, and engage in both front-stage performances and back-stage manoeuvrings. The issue of reputation is crucial here, containing as it does improvisational and performative dimensions, perhaps as much, if not more, than being competence- or skills-based. At times, the ability to manage complex relationships overshadows the issue of reform or policy at hand and, certainly, suggests that both practices of translation and the construction of rather complex policy assemblages are more features of consultancy modes than traditional notions of policy transfer imply (cf. Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009).

The political economy, or materiality, of consultancy is also worthy of note, with international development consultants frequently paid daily fees of 1000 US Dollars or above[12], whilst being nominally responsible to local counterparts in Governments with monthly salaries which are often significantly below this amount. In addition, the rules of New Public Management, particularly 'competitive tendering', are not always strictly adhered to. In the cases above, there was direct recruitment, largely based on word of mouth reputation. In other cases where rules require a competitive tendering process, processes can be framed in terms which make it highly likely that the desired consultant will be appointed. At the same time, the nature of competitive tendering encourages the practices of both 'body shopping' (recruiting people via internet searches) and 'body swapping' (replacing those whose CVs were used as 'tender fodder' by persons known to the winning bidder).

Elsewhere, I have stressed the liminality of many aspects of transnational development consultancy (Stubbs, 2002), encouraging a kind of 'Rough Guide' approach to politics and culture, exploring how routinised practices such as being met at the airport by white Jeep, taken to a good hotel (airports, flight schedules and choice of hotels are frequent topics of conversation amongst consultants), and going to the best restaurants, often with other consultants or key intermediaries, tend to privilege certain kinds of knowledge and understanding at the expense of others. It is not unimportant, in this context, that only in the third case study and, to an extent in the fourth, are relationships with actors from 'client state' bodies of any relevance but that, even here, the primary management is done by the international development agency. In later interventions in B-H, these agencies even went so far as to create a counterpart central state agency to engage with. At the same time,

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[12] „How many days were you allocated?" and „What fee was agreed?" are two frequently asked questions when consultants meet. The vagaries of the exchange rate between the Euro, the US dollar, and the British pound have also been important in recent years.

consultants who are nested in a complex web of relationships with diverse audiences, as well as those whose primary credibility derives from other roles within the country or elsewhere have, in a sense, an advantage in terms of the management of impressions if not always in terms of 'getting things done'. It is, perhaps, less the 'heroic' or 'normative' dimension of Weber's idea of charismatic forms of leadership which is relevant here, and more the idea of the use of 'personality' or personal characteristics to manage relationships. In addition to assessments of consultants by different counterparts which do relate to imputed skills (such as knowing the topic well), as well as habits (submitting good quality reports on time is one of the most frequent), the idea of being 'funny' or 'interesting' in some way is often stressed, whereas normativity or political commitments are rarely mentioned.

One of the aspects of consultancy stressed in the joke which begins this paper is that of the use of technologies which, using the dramaturgical metaphor, might be described as 'props' or, according to actor-network theory, 'actants' which, although they may be 'non-human', are enrolled in networks (cf. Callon, 1986). The importance of this is revealed by an email I received, as Team Leader for a DFID evaluation, from an ex-Ministry of Defence employee who asked me "should I bring a suit and a laptop?". Whilst it is, of course, the case that "care has to be taken where using material and props" (Clark, 1995, 127) lest 'technique' becomes the main focus, it is also the case that consultancy performance is often judged in terms of the quality of presentations, including the use of power point presentations, flip charts, hand-outs, and the like, often based on partially pre-formed designs, templates or frameworks.

The incorporation of 'participatory stakeholder workshops' into international development work has, of course, been scrutinised from the perspective of whether it really introduces a more 'progressive' and 'democratic' element into asymmetrical processes of power (cf. Cooke and Kothari, 2001). In three of the four case studies, such workshops appear front of stage. In the second, they are used to obtain 'buy in' for a project from local stakeholders and, in the process, supposedly tailoring the project to local needs as well as providing an initial assessment of the 'readiness' of local stakeholders to participate. In the third, they are utilised as a 'reality check' on consultants' proposals as well as being seen as fulfilling a commitment to 'consult' with front line workers although not, at all, with service users. In the fourth, the 'success' of such a workshop is deemed important in terms of how to proceed. The potential for disruption of a particular project can be found in such performances but, in reality, is often minimised by careful stage management.

In many ways, it is the use of elements of an 'audit culture' rhetoric (cf. Strathern (ed.), 2000), enrolling logical frameworks, benchmarking, toolkits, and the like in the service of, variously, performance-based, output-based, evidence-based and/or results-based approaches, combined with a lack of such perspectives on the consultants' own work which, instead, focuses on aspects of process and performance, which marks the paradox of the consultancy encounters discussed here. It is the assembling of rather contradictory elements and the use of often competing 'logics in translation' which define these encounters. The importance of translation, of course, goes beyond language, although the use of translators for certain discussions, and the ability of consultants to speak different languages, as well as

communicate in different registers, is also important[13]. Many of the encounters which most resemble 'contact zones' actually involve the difficulty of translating certain key concepts, such as 'statutory services' or 'reference centres', into the local language(s), again empowering those intermediaries most fluent in credible translations of the key terms of 'project English'.

The relation between 'local' and 'foreign' runs through all of the case studies here. In a sense, the failure in case one relates to the consultants being defined as too close to 'the local' and not sufficiently enrolled within the rhetorics and practices of international development agencies. In cases two and three, in different ways, I attempted to enrol aspects of my connection to 'the local' in order to achieve certain situational, personal, and strategic goals. The paradox here is that, of course, the idea of a binary opposition between 'local' and 'foreign' is both central to the organising logics of international development, and impossible to maintain, in any meaningful sense, within the 'black box' of everyday encounters. As Wedel (2000, 2004) has suggested, the importance of multiple or 'transidentities' in flex networks rests, *inter alia*, on the erosion of the clear distinction between local and foreign, and is crucial to the ways in which a new class of brokers are able to 'get things done'. Many of the actors in our case studies embrace both 'local' and 'international' settings and are, indeed, skilled as fashioning their identities along this continuum to suit the main audience at any particular moment in time. When this is combined with the erosion of boundaries between 'formal' and 'informal' and 'state' and 'nonstate', then it is those best able to engage in 'strategic brokerage' (Larner and Craig, 2005) or 'boundary spanning' (Williams, 2002) who may be best able to manage consultancy encounters in their own interests.

At the same time, consultancy in international development is always framed in what is an unequal power relationship between an international and a local actor or actors. Even if the need for a consultancy input is directly expressed by a local actor as, it can be argued, to an extent, occurred in cases three and four, it is the international agency which provides funding and which, often, plays the key role in selection, task definition and evaluation. Whilst it may be essentialist to argue that the project, programme, strategy, reform or policy is always already 'foreign' to the body it is being introduced into, it is never only rooted in local experience, but rather always already routed through a mobile, and highly unpredictable, process of translation. The first case study is entirely focused around the internal dynamics of an international development actor, with the second and third cases showing how, at the time, the UK's international development agency proceeded with rather complex, one might argue neo-colonialist, interventions based at least as much on their own preoccupations as on an understanding of political economies in the sites of intervention. Indeed, I recall, in the second case, being rather shocked by how much of the project funds were likely to be returned to the UK through the use of consultants, a not infrequent (if too often informal) criticism of international development assistance.

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[13] The often repeated joke that, during and after the war, B-H had some of "the best qualified drivers and interpreters in the world" is relevant here, both in terms of the gap between what positions could be occupied by 'locals' and 'internationals'. At the same time, there are numerous examples of translators being promoted as their (wider) skills became noticed. Indeed, Janine Wedel's discussion of Ešref Kenan Rašidagić's move from 'translator' to 'consultant' "manoeuvring through a welter of international, state, and nongovernmental organizations" (Wedel, 2009; 24) identifies me as key to his mobility.

The complexities of 'time' are, also, crucial to make sense of consultancy encounters. It is not only the fact that consultancy assignments tend to be measured in days and, therefore, promote a kind of rapidity of intervention which contrasts with many counterparts who have permanent jobs and, therefore, literally have "time on their side" and, indeed, tell tales of how they have seen numerous consultants "come and go". Development interventions are, often, planned in one context and implemented much later than anticipated, so that the rhythms of the consultancy cycle are, often quite perverse. In the second case, the length of an intervention encouraged the company concerned to pace its interventions carefully and worked against any risk taking. In this sense, then, the question of how to maximise the benefits of consultancy inputs, whilst lying outside the scope of this paper, is more complex than a demand for longer, rather than shorter, periods of intervention.

As noted above, the issue of the dominance of 'technical' over 'political' aspects of consultancy is striking in all of the case studies, although even this binary may not survive critical scrutiny for long. Indeed, it may well be the ways in which backstage political understandings and connections are used in order to smooth the way to 'get things done', represents a rather complex fusion of the two. The role of 'flex nets' as 'resource pools' (Wedel, 2009; 16), able to prescribe, co-ordinate, implement, promote, and justify particular policies ties this form of power to new forms of transnational clientelism. These operate most visibly in hybrid environments marked by redefinitions of sovereignty involving the sub-contracting of governance, in which international development actors, and their consultants, are an integral part of the processes their interventions purport to change (cf. Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS: the limits of (auto)ethnography

Whilst the case studies reveal many things about the paradoxes of transnational consultancy, there is a need to move beyond autoethnographic methods and, indeed, beyond a prime focus on consultancy *per se*, in order to tease out the broader significance of the encounters discussed here. Certainly, whilst this kind of ethnography provides insights into relationships and practices and their assemblage in translation, it tends to reduce discussion of the multi-sitedness of inquiry, or the nature of flows across time and space, to that which the autoethnographer observed, participated in, heard about, and/or speculated upon. Whilst autoethnographic methods are well suited to understanding how different forces, relationships and dynamics are condensed in particular locations, they are less useful in terms of articulating "the ways in which different sites, scales and spaces ... are articulated to one another" (Clarke and Stubbs, 2010).

Burawoy's emphasis on 'revisiting' the field (Burawoy, 2003), through interviewing a range of respondents, and continuing to bring theory (back) to the field, in order to understand processes of historical change, can take us further. Indeed, reassembling the case studies here, from the perspective of a broader political economy of policy change, would offer different kinds of insights, whether primarily focused on a particular site or sites, a particular agency or agencies, and/or a particular theme or themes. Beyond this, linking these case studies to others which may be more directly focused on the interventions of agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF, would enrich the model presented here, connecting issues of social policy reform to 'economic' reforms which may be seen as prior or dominant whilst,

perhaps, revealing that these, too, have a more mediated and negotiated dimension than is often assumed. The 'incommensurability' between an understanding of 'the concrete instance' and an understanding of 'larger scale forces, interests and tendencies' (Clarke and Stubbs, 2010), can be bridged not by resting content with the study of supposedly 'macro-level' determinisms nor with descriptions of 'micro-level' practices but, rather, with sustained efforts to explore the unfinished, complex, contradictory, and, indeed, messy nature of social formations as assemblages in translation, through the study of the re-transcribing of socio-economic, political, administrative and cultural practices. The study of transnational consultancy offers an entrée into these processes but, if narrowly addressed, provides only limited access to the "entanglement of meaning making with power and politics" (Clarke and Stubbs, 2010).

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