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## Using Community Development Simulations in Divergent International Contexts

### Abstract

Developing educational tools for community development which are applicable in a cross cultural context is a challenge. This project shows the value of simulations in teaching the complexities of economic, environmental and political issues at the local level. Key to developing extension materials appropriate for use in cross cultural contexts is the flexibility of design and ability to easily adapt to differing contexts. Successful use of the Community Land Use and Economics Simulation (CLUES) in the Slovak context is attributed to its open design which allowed players to create options not originally envisioned.

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### Background

Community issues programming challenges Cooperative Extension educators to cross traditional programmatic lines to address linkages between environmental, social, economic and political issues (Deller, et. al. 1994). Simulations are an effective mechanism to introduce the complexities of community issues to Extension clientele. It is a challenge to develop simulations complex enough to model reality yet flexible enough to accommodate the unique and creative options that players devise. In an Extension environment of increasing cultural diversity, educational tools must be robust for use in widely divergent contexts.

Since the breakup of the Soviet allied states, Cooperative Extension has enjoyed numerous opportunities to share pedagogy with Eastern European colleagues. A key challenge has been the need to develop materials that are both culturally sensitive and demonstrate alternative approaches to community development in a market driven context. This paper provides a comparative review of experience with the Community Land Use and Economics Simulation (CLUES) in New York and in Slovakia to demonstrate the importance of a flexible and open ended simulation design.

### Methodology

The CLUES simulation was developed to model the complex interaction between social, environmental, political and economic forces at the community level (Eberts, et. al., 1994). It was field tested with community leaders and other academics from the northeast U.S. in 1991-1994 and further adapted for use with college and 4-H student audiences. The CLUES simulation was first tested in a non-U.S. context in March 1995 with a group of central and eastern European graduate students at the University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia. It was translated into Slovak (Belajova and Acs, 1996) and used with sophomores at the university in February, 1996.

### Structure of the Simulation

The simulation divides the players into five teams representing key sectors of a local economy. Primary (agriculture), secondary (light and heavy industry), and tertiary (consumer goods, specialty services and business services) sectors are reflected among the teams. The Simulation Manager represents the outside world - national government and outside competition. Economic aspects of play demonstrate the importance of competition and monopoly in determining prices, wages and the distribution of wealth in the community.

There are two political groups in the simulation - a planning board and a community council that include representatives elected from each team. The need for community planning is demonstrated through decisions about extension of utilities, land use changes, siting of new public facilities and environmental, economic or social crises. Community budgeting is a critical feature of the simulation as the Community Council grapples with rising costs of public services, need for new investment, and inequities in the incidence of local taxes.

### Meeting Slovakian Training Needs

A simulation can provide an opportunity for players to experiment with different regulatory options in tax and fee structure, land use controls, and service provision. It also provides important experience in what it means to be

part of a competitive market economy. In Slovakia, local communities are faced with radical transformation both of their economies and of their political systems. Uncertainty prevails and local leaders are challenged to negotiate this rapidly changing regulatory and economic landscape. The CLUES simulation can help Slovak citizens understand the challenges and complexities of community development and allow them to experiment with new policy forms, necessitated by their highly unstable economic and political environment.

The effects of Slovakia's economic and political transition are felt most keenly at the local level. State subsidies comprised 70% of local budgets in 1992 (before independence) but today account for only 26%. At the same time, local government responsibility for service provision has widened.

This local budgetary crisis is coupled with a radically transforming economic system as Slovakia privatizes state and cooperative enterprises and a new entrepreneurial sector emerges. Direct business support for social and community welfare was a standard feature under state socialism. In 1989 agricultural cooperatives gave the same level of subsidy as the national government now gives to support culture, sports and social services. Today, declining revenues and competitive market pressures are reducing the level of such private sector supports.

Politically, opportunities for democratic participation have widened but local communities, accustomed to central planning and control, are only beginning to explore wider options for local planning.

### **Results**

The simulation is a particularly useful extension tool in a context where laws and regulations are shifting as these can be changed with ease, providing the players an opportunity to deal with the impact of such changes on local economic and political processes. Differences in the way Slovak and U.S. players approach the CLUES simulation are related to their differing historical experiences. The simulation's success as a cross-cultural community development extension tool was based on its flexible and open-ended design. Important differences between Slovakia and the US were successfully accommodated in the economic, planning and visioning aspects of the simulation.

Although players in both Slovakia and the U.S. have little direct personal experience with investing, the competitive aspects of play come more naturally to U.S. players. The Slovak teams were slow to challenge monopolies, so the Simulation Manager encouraged price competition by bringing in outside competition.

Community financing is a key constraint in the simulation. CLUES was designed around U.S. notions of taxation and bonding, but could accommodate the more creative public-private partnerships designed by Slovak teams. These included direct business subsidies and loans to finance infrastructure and social services. New forms of public finance in Slovakia will undoubtedly include some level of direct private sector support and CLUES demonstrated the limits market competition will place on firms' ability to continue this tradition.

Inequality in wealth distribution, a key challenge for U.S. players, was addressed head-on by Slovak players. The Community Council showed greater sensitivity to the lower class team and explored alternative public financing options whose incidence was more progressive. The lower class team itself moved quickly and successfully to reduce its costs or raise its wages early in the simulation. Among U.S. players the lower class worker team often has trouble developing a survival strategy or convincing the community to address its concerns without a major crisis (such as going on strike).

Planning and visioning were addressed quite differently by U.S. and Slovak players. Debriefing between rounds of play proved critical to ensuring the simulation's relevance in both contexts and demonstrated fundamental differences in the way the game was played. The simulation was designed to demonstrate the importance of community planning in the context of a market driven economy. U.S. players, who gravitate toward the competitive aspects of the simulation, often assume "winning" means acquiring the most wealth. This focus on competition makes it difficult for players to recognize the structural features of income inequality. Only after several rounds of play do players begin to realize a purely competitive, unplanned development strategy yields a distribution of wealth and level of amenities below the minimum desired for community well-being.

Slovak players, accustomed to high levels of services and social equality, moved first to resolve structural inequalities by changing the taxation system and upgrading wages. The challenge for Slovak groups was to understand the complexities of price and wage competition in a free market economy. To achieve their goals of enhanced community well being they were forced to grapple with the complexity of market interaction - competition and private investment - in order build sufficient private wealth to provide the basis for future community investment.

### **Conclusion**

Simulations can be useful in a cross cultural context because they provide an opportunity to practice aspects of community development with which the players have relatively less experience - community planning in the U.S. case and market competition in the Slovak case. Key to success in using simulations with diverse audiences is an open ended design flexible enough to accommodate creative and unique solutions proposed by players.

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