



Carpathian Civil Society Platform

Creation of an inter-regional civil society hub for social inclusion in the Carpathian region project

REPORT ON THE INTER-REGIONAL MEETING

October 2-3, 2018, KOSICE, SLOVAKIA

Altogether 57 participants representing 40 NGOs from Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine took part at the Inter-regional meeting in Kosice. The event was organized and implemented by the four partner organizations of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform project: Carpathian Foundation-Hungary, ETP Slovakia, Carpathian Foundation Ukraine and Gate of Carpathians Foundation in Poland.

For the list of participating NGOs, please see our website:

http://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/sites/karpatokalapitvany.hu/files/List%20of%20NGOs_Kosice_2018.pdf

October 2, 2018

Slavka Macakova from ETP Slovakia welcomed the participants on behalf of the four partner organizations: Carpathian Foundation-Hungary, ETP Slovakia, Gate of Carpathians Foundation and Carpathian Foundation Ukraine.

H.E. Henk Cor van der Kwast, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Slovakia gave an opening speech expressing the importance of the event. Civil society is being an essential pillar for a stable democracy he believed that this Inter-regional meeting would be a great step for further cooperation and activities of the NGOs.

Ratislav Trnka, the President of Kosice Self-governing Region welcomed the initiative of Carpathian Foundation-Hungary to build a strong civil platform in the Carpathian region. He talked about development and novelties in the region regarding the development of marginalized groups. He was sure that the Interregional Civil Society Hub for social innovation in the Carpathian region provides a good foundation for the civil society to improve.

The keynote speech was delivered by **Péter Hunčík, writer and psychiatrist** under the title *Confidence measure building in the Carpathians through cooperation*. Mr. Huncik outlined the state of civil society in the Carpathian region considering its weight, role and tasks to form society and has influence on the wellbeing of societies. His thoughts gave a common ground for the participants for further discussions and considerations.

Presentation on the Carpathian Civil Society Platform and Regional Hub for Social Innovation.

Sándor Köles, President, Carpathian Foundation-Hungary. (Sándor Köles was not able to participate due to health problems; therefore his presentation was delivered by Marta Rakusz, the project coordinator from Carpathian Foundation-Hungary.)

The presentation of Sándor Köles summarized the background of the project and the process.

For the full presentation please visit our website:

<http://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/en/iras/inter-regional-workshop-kosice-2-3-october-2018>

Panel discussion - Country-specific topics in inter-regional context. Panelists: Ruslan Zhylenko (Ukraine), Maria Gajewska (Poland), Gergő Ozsváth Cseke (Hungary), Miroslav Pollak (Slovakia)

Panelists summarized the findings of the local workshops in each country. They focused on the following questions: What are the main challenges/issues NGOs are facing in each country and in the region? What are the main outcomes, results or suggestions of regional workshops? How do they see the potential of cooperation among NGOs in their region and inter-regionally as well? What kind of opportunities and obstacles do they identify?

Ruslan Zhylenko (Ukraine): We involved the ten strongest civil society organizations (CSOs) working with different groups of voluntary people, there are organizations working in the field of community development, organizations working with women, working with victims of domestic violence, organizations working with poor, homeless people and internally displaced people.

Main motivations for organizations to take part in the project: new partnerships, new experiences, new funding opportunities.

External challenges: peculiarities of legislation, potential from the media to the activities of CSOs. Donor's policy. Politics uses CSOs in their own interests. Huge gap between NGOs in rural and urban areas in all respects (organizational development, capacity, fundraising opportunities, professionalism, and skills).

Internal challenges: weak capacities and organizational development. Lack of skills in fundraising. Lack of professional cooperation skills in dealing with local authorities. Lack of partnerships. Insufficient media presence. Weak involvement of volunteers. Poor volunteer management. Gender misbalance in NGOs. Difficulty to make people locally active. Few possibilities to provide paid services due to legislation.

All participating organizations started to make offerings to help each other with respect to the identified challenges. We decided on some simple first steps for further cooperation – inviting each other to the events organized by participating NGOs, involving smaller NGOs, sharing experiences.

One concern from the Ukrainian participants: how will the Civil Society Platform operate in the future when funding is over? It shouldn't be a very rigid structure burdened with agreements. The future operation of the platform should be discussed with the partners from the other countries.

Maria Gajewska (Poland): In Poland eleven organizations took part in the preparatory local workshop. We discussed challenges in four topic groups: economic, human, mental and political challenges. Civil organizations in the Carpathian region of Poland do not recognize the different level of cooperation despite of the similarities in economics, culture, social issues. The finding of the workshop is that we don't share knowledge, and we do not cooperate, because we don't know, how to cooperate. There is competition rather than cooperation. Other challenges are burning out, and weak leadership. There are economic challenges for NGOs as well, and there is no civil movement, lack of sources or fundraising. Knowledge, education, management. There is a need to involve actors from the economic sector for the improvement of NGOs. Other challenges are also that there is no information flow at bottom level, and that the media is not interested in the work of the NGOs. We have to start to communicate with each other.

Mental challenges: there is no activity, people are tired. Raising radicalism in comments, local leaders think that civil sector is not working normally. We have to start to communicate with each other, we have to make the media interested in the work of NGOs. We have to start cooperation now. We should include education, knowledge transfer, sharing experiences.

The HUB is a great opportunity to cooperate, to share problems, experiences and face challenges together. The Platform will help us to be more optimistic about the future of NGOs.

Gergő Ozsváth Cseke (Hungary): In the workshops in Hungary, we identified the main challenges of NGOs and the civil society jointly by the participating 12 NGOs from the Hungarian part of the Carpathian region.

These are:

- lack of funding, lack of local philanthropy and CSR, lack of tax incentives, little knowledge of NGOs how to generate income other than proposals and about innovative, diverse funding sources;
- civil stigma – generated by government and the media biased and controlled by the government, smear campaigns, GONGOs, poor knowledge of everyday people about NGO's work;
- lack of effective communication of NGOs, lack of transparency,
- projects are not sustainable, the work of NGOs is very much project based;
- the mental state of society, our culture - passive and unmotivated people, also bad image of poor, disadvantaged people is projected in media, deterioration in their situation;
- visibility of CSOs sector through the media should be raised

We want to set normal cooperation between organizations of platform: sharing of information, generating new ideas, and most importantly, creating and sharing knowledge. Also new partnerships, and collaboration of participating NGOs are expected inter-regionally as well.

Miroslav Pollak (Slovakia):

The establishment of the hublet was agreed in Košice by representatives of fourteen non-profit organizations from Slovakia, who have long-term been active in poor Roma communities. The workshop was organized by ETP Slovakia. All participants of the workshop described the most important areas/topics of their work, their innovative practices as well as the outcomes their non-profit achieves. The main topic/area of each participating organization was offered to other organizations as an area of a mutual cooperation for more organizations. The list of the socially and economically least developed communities will provide the workshop's participants the ideas where non-profit actors should focus their joined forces and provide comprehensive services to children and adults in the fields of education, financial inclusion, housing, health and social work.

The main challenges identified on the Slovak workshop are peculiarities of legislation regarding the different forms of civil organizations; not many active CSOs and NGOs; apathy; there is no real freedom; enemy speech against NGOs.

Our aim should be to become more active (Think global, act local!) and more professional. A main issue is to save the independency of education and the NGO sector. The Civil Platform is a good platform for looking at new ideas, sharing experience and building a powerful new civil society. The founders of hublet are convinced that the newly established platform will create a perspective and sustainable pathway that will join forces to achieve the social inclusion of the most

disadvantaged groups for the benefit of not only disadvantaged groups but also the society as a whole.

Following the reports from the local workshops panelists discussed the similarities in challenges identified. It was summarized that there is a common ground for which is a good basis for cooperation. The Carpathian Civil Society Platform will be a place for NGOs to share experiences, to learn from each other, try new ideas, and learn from failures and successes.

Team building activities – at the end of the first day of the meeting the participants took part at various team-building activities to get to know each other and to connect with people from different countries of the region.

October 3, 2018

Presentation of the Strategy and the draft Feasibility Study on the Platform and the Hub –

Sándor Köles, as mentioned above, due to absence of the speaker, the presentation was made by Ruslan Zhylenko, director of Carpathian Foundation Ukraine.

For the full presentation please visit our website:

<http://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/en/iras/inter-regional-workshop-kosice-2-3-october-2018>

Discussions in breakout groups – mapping opportunities for inter-regional cooperation, planning the future operation of the Civil Platform and the HUB

There were three breakout groups around three different topics facilitated by three experts from three countries.

Group 1 Community Development

Group 2 Organizational Development (development of other NGOs)

Group 3 Marginalized Communities

Participants registered for the group according to their interest. After the group sessions, the facilitators of the groups summarized the findings of the discussions to the audience.

Group 1 – Community Development – facilitated by Maria Gajewska, expert, Gate of Carpathians Foundation, Poland.

The approach was to think over what we already have with respect to communities:

- We already have a community, we know how it works, how it grows, and sometimes collapses
- Dignity, safety in everyday life
- Think global - act local
- Solidarity
- Fairness, truth
- Richness of diversity, we are different but the variety is very rich
- Roots – who we are, where we come from, background.

The question is: how can we act together, what can we do in the future as a HUB:

- Change the approach, not I but WE

- Expertise and similarities – what can we share
- Connections – wish to do more
- Involvement and exchange
- Learning organizations – we know that we make mistakes but we try to be better every day
- Cultural discussions – there is space for everyone to bring anything into the discussions
- Approach for together

What/how/ this HUB should be:

- Animated
- Platform for exchanges and experience
- Space for experimentation
- Visibility
- Make new connection
- Collaboration
- Space for failure

Group 2 Organizational Development – facilitated by Natalia Beley, Carpathian Foundation Ukraine.

In this group discussion participants expressed that they need a clearer understanding of the goals and activities of the HUB and the Platform, therefore they defined several conclusions and recommendations:

- To make a step back and review a project itself and receive clarity on HUB structure
- Simple understanding about the HUB, user-friendly language
- Need to understand the value of HUB for each country and each participating NGOs
- Unique feature of the HUB
- Common ground for NGOs
- More meetings and discussions for participating organizations
- Narrow list of problems and issues to deal with
- Re-format meeting towards discussions instead of presentations
- Possibilities for small international problems
- Share knowledge
- More simple principles of the HUB
- Resources and funding for the HUB
- Constant interaction for the participating NGOs

Group 3 Marginalized Communities – facilitated by Miroslav Pollak, expert, ETP Slovakia.

The group discussed the form of international cooperation within the platform, and the group proposed the following structure (matrix) to list all participating NGOs of the HUB in order to get to know each other more deeply and to be able to cooperate with each other:

	Organization title	Mission	Service	Need
NGO				
CSO				

Ideas and suggestions for the services/projects:

- language courses for all the NGOs from the Carpathian region;

- 1-2 day workshops with visiting potential partner organizations in order to get acquainted with each other (there is a need for personal contact not only platform contacts)
- Informal knowledge sharing is essential
- the Platform should serve as an inspiration, making us positively changed
- Printed online book of good practices
- Presentation of results
- Meeting at least once a year
- Study exchanges
- Exchange of information is an important role of the platform

Wrap-up, conclusions, and next steps.

The findings of the meeting are very valuable for future work, and the Inter-regional meeting was a great first step towards cooperation. All findings, suggestions, recommendations will be included in the Feasibility Study in order to have a final strategy that is highly effective for the future operation of the Platform.

The next steps of the project were shortly summarized:

- Finalization of the Strategy and the Feasibility Study
- Workshops for smaller CSOs to introduce the hublets
- Finalization of the hublets strategies and proposal for the inter-regional one
- Trainings for CSOs based on needs
- Mini-project development
- Second Inter-regional event (Platform)
- Creation of the Virtual Hub

On behalf of the organizers and partner organizations of the meeting, Marta Rakusz thanked everyone for their participation and invited the participants and the guests to take part in the next Inter-regional event of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform, which will be held in Hungary in June 2019.

Graphic notes have been taken throughout the event, which was very popular among participants, and is a useful tool for disseminating the findings of the meeting. For the graphic notes please visit our website:

http://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/sites/karpatokalapitvany.hu/files/karpatok_2018.pdf

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