

## **Carpathian Civil Society Platform**

### **REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

June 13-14, 2019, EGER, HUNGARY

Altogether 123 participants representing 72 NGOs from Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine took part at the closing conference in Eger. 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.

#### ***June 12, 2019***

Networking dinner was followed by a guided city walk to get to know some sights and emblematic places of Eger.

#### ***June 13, 2019***

**Sándor Köles, President of the Board of Directors of the Carpathian Foundation-Hungary** welcomed the participants on behalf of the four partner organizations.

**René van Hell, Dutch Ambassador to Hungary** gave an opening speech expressing the importance of the event. He described the importance of civil society in Netherlands in processes of establishing of cooperation and communication between citizens to protect their rights. The key role for the civil society organization is the “watchdog” of the government. In young democracies, the civil society plays their crucial role to prevent confrontation and exclusion. The Ambassador also highlighted the importance of the objectives of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform.

**Marit E Jacobsen, Deputy Head of Secretariat, Norwegian Barents Cooperation** in her speech emphasized the importance of well-structured civil society organizations in turbulent times. The Norwegian Barents Secretariat's main goal is to make it as easy as possible to initiate Norwegian-Russian cooperation projects. The goal of the Barents cooperation has always been to remove cultural barriers and to build bridges across the borders. An important task for the Secretariat is to visualize the regional activity and increase the international support for the cooperation. The efficiency of civil society organizations depends on participant's hard work in organizational building and maintaining its structure. She highlighted the peculiarities of Norwegian-Russian cooperation in Barents region and showed its potential usage in the Carpathian region. Ms. Jacobsen emphasized also the participation of citizens on social and public life, i.e. on development of mature civil society. As an example, Ms. Jacobsen mentioned that an average Norwegian, older than 16 years is a member of three non-profit organizations.

**Harald Egerer, Head, UNEP Carpathian Convention** gave a presentation on Carpathian Convention, whose goal is environmental protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian region by using the potential for social innovation in the revitalization of Carpathian mountain communities. Mr. Egerer defined the role and value of cross-border conventions in the framework of the European partnerships.

**On behalf of The European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL) William Van Dingenen** gave a summary of the activity of their organizations. AEIDL's goal is to support the establishment of a Europe made by citizens for citizens, taking into account the unique social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects of each territory, in a process of sustainable development based on equal opportunities and partnership. AEIDL is routinely involved in projects aimed at bringing Europe closer to its citizens, promoting interaction between citizens and civil society organizations and promoting intercultural

dialogue. It is now widely recognized for its distinctive approach to viewing markets from the perspective of their contribution to social progress, and to upholding a respect for individuals and the importance of local initiative.

**Collective experiences on the process - Panel discussion on the progress of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform.** Panelists: Slávka Mačáková (Director, ETP Slovakia), Maria Gajewska (Expert, Brama Karpat Foundation), Ruslan Zhylenko (Director, Carpathian Foundation Ukraine), Boglárka Bata (Director, Carpathian Foundation-Hungary).

**Sándor Köles** and **Márta Rakusz**, panel facilitators briefly summarized the project activities that has been implemented: kick-off meeting to discuss project activities and methods, four local meetings in each partners' country to involve the most influential CSOs, an inter-regional meeting in Kosice to evaluate the proposed strategies of the local hubs and explore common challenges and interventions, four or more local meetings to involve additional 8-10 NGOs in each country, capacity building trainings, mini-grant scheme, networking.

Panelists summarized the findings of the previous events in each country. They focused on the following questions: How did the process of involvement of NGOs go and how this was implemented? What was the first challenges when you start the project? What was the main findings of workshops? What was the organizations that joined to the HUB? What was the projects implemented in each country?

**Boglárka Bata, Director, Carpathian Foundation-Hungary**, highlighted the implementation of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform project in Hungary. Carpathian Foundation-Hungary actively works with almost 50 NGOs located in Carpathian region of Hungary. Participants from these NGOs were invited to take part at the local meetings, where external and internal challenges were jointly mapped. Four main challenges were detected, and based on that four areas (funding and financials; mental state of Hungarian society; civil stigma; internal problems of civil organizations – communication, visibility, IT, publicity, organizational capacity) it was defined what to focus on when working jointly with the NGOs. As a main result, the dilemma of “collaboration vs. competition” occurred, we had to face it when organizing the events, process. During our workshops and implementation of the project we realized that communication is fragmented and ties between organizations are weak. Therefore, we focused our resources to enhance these areas. Mostly we tried to involve organizations working in the sector of community development, and poverty alleviation. Our organizations have similar experience in the sector, therefore, the challenges are the same. Smaller organizations were more open to the cooperation than the bigger ones.

**Maria Gajewska, Expert, Brama Karpat Foundation** talked about competition between NGOs instead of cooperation in civil space. It was difficult to find potential NGOs and involve them into the project. Many of them rejected invitations. We had many conversations about the process of implementing of all the goals of the project. The Platform helped to bring together all the separated partners.

In the beginning of the project, we realized that our partners need support. So, we opened consultation office for providing technical support. We focused on the needs of the Polish partners. We tried to make clear all our steps in cooperation with organizations.

**Slávka Mačáková, Director, ETP Slovakia** talked about the peculiarities of involving NGOs in Slovakia for cooperation in civil space. Today there are 16 nonprofit organizations from Slovakia, who joined the HUB. The Platform is open to new NGOs who work with social exclusion and generational poverty, the title of the platform reflects common interests and goals of its members: *Bridge Out of Generational Poverty*.

The workshops in Slovakia had very specific atmosphere. The Platform members work together to achieve their common goals, i.e. to help NGOs to better integrate Roma people or people in poverty into society. The Platform also prepared recommendations for EU Partnership Agreement Vision 2021-2027.

At the beginning the initiator of the workshops in Slovakia (ETP Slovakia) invited bigger organizations to the Platform. Later, smaller non-profits were also involved to participate. Together, the Platform members achieve good results but there are still many things that need to be done.

The Slovak non-profit organizations tried to widen their impact in localities, where they operate. Some organizations implemented mini-projects focused on marketing their non-profit, communication or promotion. Some organizations didn't achieve all set goals because of limited amount of the mini-grants.

After a question from the plenary “What currently is the biggest obstacle in the realization of the NGO’s goals and objectives?”, Mrs. Mačáková responded: “Enormous and unnecessary bureaucracy related to project implementation, as the bureaucracy has been increasing in recent years.”

**Ruslan Zhylenko, Director, Carpathian Foundation Ukraine** highlighted the process of involving NGOs into the project. The main question was: What we can propose for these NGOs? Carpathian Foundation Ukraine worked on the problem of separating external and internal challenges. Ukrainian NGOs face lack of professionalism and competences, and lack of communication with authorities and communities. We have made a challenge map to see our next steps in the project. First, we worked with quite experienced NGOs and then we involved 11 smaller organizations.

Our workshops helped us to implement one bigger project and three smaller projects. Other projects are still under implementation.

This Platform is a good opportunity to find new partners across the borders. We involved quite different organizations mostly from rural areas. These organizations, for example, work with Roma people, with veterans etc. Our organizations need support in their activities and this Platform will help them on their way.

On the first afternoon of the conference, participants worked in five thematic groups to which participants signed up previously according to their interests:

Group 1 Bridges out of generational poverty – facilitated by Slávka Mačáková.

Group 2 All different – all equal. Social inclusion as a tool for equal opportunities and respect to identity – facilitated by Ruslan Zhylenko.

Group 3 Carpathian culture - the roots of existing together – facilitated by Maria Gajewska.

Group 4 Power to the people - Citizen engagement through community development – facilitated by Márta Rakusz.

Group 5 How to cope with shrinking civil space? – facilitated by Sándor Köles.

The main goal of the workshops were to get to know each other and the activities of the organizations, as well as mapping common challenges, possible areas for cooperation within the thematic area of the workshops. After the group sessions one person from each group gave a short summary on the topics covered at the workshops.

In the evening, participants took part in a **community cultural evening** with folk music and dance in order to get an insight to Hungarian traditional culture.

### ***June 14, 2019***

The second day of the conference started with the second session of the thematic group workshops, where the main goal was to start working on joint projects based on the mapped common challenges.

Summary of the workshops:

#### ***Group 1 Bridges out of generational poverty***

Thirteen participants from three countries participated at the workshop (Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine).

After the introduction session, participants discussed the question: what needs to be done to help the person in need, who has been born into generational poverty so that the person can live decent life. The participants shared their own personal experiences and experiences of the organizations they represented. They focused on presentation of activities and services provided to the people living in poverty in the five crucial areas/sectors (housing, education, employment, health and financial literacy).

The workshop resulted in a common understanding of all workshop’s participants that only a comprehensive and holistic approach encompassing all problematic areas gives hope to individuals and their families on their journey from poverty to middle class.

This common understanding was visually presented on a model of an imaginary path/journey from poverty to middle class walking over a bridge, supported by five pillars over “a sea full of sharks” (pitfalls). The bridge is based on 5 pillars: (1) housing and family stability, (2) health/wellbeing & social networks, (3) education, (4) financial stability, (5) employment & career.

The participants also had an opportunity to learn more about the importance of bringing people together in communities, allowing them to learn together about the information they need and then engaging them in the building multi-sectoral networks to enable changes at the community level. All areas/sectors should be inherently silo-busting and holistic.

All workshop's participants agreed that an important part of the problem (i.e. social inclusion of generationally poor people) is to shape public opinion and the attitude of the majority society towards the people living in poverty. Finally, it was emphasized that socio-economic problems should not be confused with characteristics and features of the ethnicity/race. (Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries).

### **Group 2 All different – all equal. Social inclusion as a tool for equal opportunities and respect to identity**

20 participants from Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary took part in the thematic group.

During session 1 the participants introduced their organizations in the context of their target groups and defined the strongest abilities and capacities of their organizations.

During session 2 the participants mapped the possibilities for the joint projects within the HUB. The mapping procedure has been based on a search for areas where the capacities of two or more organizations coincide with the needs of the region or a target group. Obviously, the participants were not able to develop the project drafts within this limited period of time. Nevertheless, they have an opportunity to start thinking about this possibility comparing their own needs and capacities with the expertise and needs of their counterparts from other countries. There were sketched several opportunities for possible joint projects.

#### **Conclusions**

- There are organizations working with diverse socially excluded groups among the Hub members;
- These organizations have diverse experience and capacities in the field of social inclusion;
- Participation in the Hub opens vast opportunities for these organizations to combine their expertise and efforts in joint projects;
- Direct communication between Hub members makes possible to develop innovative, mutually beneficial projects which combine approaches from different fields (e.g. professional retraining of veterans and social entrepreneurship in rural development can be combined via tourist roots);
- Most members of Hub address the social inclusion issues at individual level (providing social services). Meanwhile the Hub creates the possibility to combine the efforts and address institutional aspects of social inclusion too (lobbying).
- The discussion did not finish at the end of thematic group. Participants continued to discuss possibilities of joint projects during the other events of the conference.

### **Group 3 Carpathian culture - the roots of existing together**

During session 1 after the introduction of the participants the group brainstormed about conception of culture and its role in society development. Participants divided into 5 smaller groups working on the subjects of Carpathian culture by the "channels" of the five senses. The facilitators put the perspective of togetherness and similar conditions of existence into group work.

In session 2 the workshop was provided by method of becoming from details to "bigger picture" effect. The group divided into 5 smaller teams was working in specific subjects - so called channels of specified sense to discover what are the most connecting and significant elements of cultural activity in Carpathians. The stronger highlighted issues of the way how the culture can connect civil society in Carpathians was: Education, Social inclusion, Involvement, Meetings and events, Science, Fusion of many fields of activity, Sport. The participants recognized the importance of inviting the media to all kind of activities, which will make fundraising and barter of services much more assessable by being more visible. The final conclusion was that it is crucial to work on creation of one big and strong organization which can provide continuation and stability of work of HUB.

### **Group 4 Power to the people - Citizen engagement through community development**

14 participants from Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Belgium and Hungary took part in the thematic group.

During the Session 1 the participants introduced themselves and their organizations in the context of their target groups and main activities.

Their target groups include rural communities, youth, children from rural communities, disabled people, Roma, marginalized communities. Activities of the participating organizations include: educational activities (mainly with children), community development, charity work, local government tasks, empowerment, rehabilitation of vulnerable groups; provision of social services, recreation, health and protection of the environment, organization of community events.

Working with world café method participants collected: the main challenges to involve their target groups, main external challenges and good examples that work for them.

As a main finding participants come to the conclusion that young people should be the main target group for involvement.

During session 2 participants mapped the possibilities for the joint projects within the HUB based on the findings of the previous Session. Participants brainstormed for topics of a common projects within the topic of youth empowerment, youth involvement, and finally decided on a Carpathian youth camp project idea. Although within this limited time participants did not have the opportunity to elaborate the project idea in full details, they discussed the main elements of it and came up with a common project plan.

All participating organizations were interested in the joint project and have agreed to continue the discussion on the project idea on the virtual HUB.

### **Group 5 How to cope with shrinking civil space?**

5 participants from Hungary, Slovakia and the Netherlands took part in the thematic group discussion. During session 1 the participants introduced themselves and their organizations. After clarification of the goal and the method of the workshop, in order to have a common understanding, a discussion started on the conceptual framework and defining elements of civic space such as:

- Structure: breadth and depth of citizen participation; diversity within civil society; level of organization; interrelations; resources
- Space/environment: political context; basic freedoms and rights; socio-economic context; socio-cultural context; legal environment; state-civil society relations; private sector-civil society relations
- Values (of civil society): democracy; transparency; tolerance; non-violence; gender equity; poverty eradication; environmental sustainability.
- Impact: influencing public policy; holding state and private corporations accountable; responding to social interests; empowering citizens; meeting societal needs.

It was followed by a discussion on the main external and internal challenges that civil society organizations are facing and compared these challenges between countries and regions to identify similarities and differences. The main outcomes of the discussion:

- Despite similarities are coming from the peripheral and mountain location of sub-regions, there are differences in the enabling political and legal environment between countries. (In our case, we could compare only the Hungarian and Slovak situation.)
- Focusing on similarities the following main issues were identified by participants:
  - isolated efforts of individual CSOs reduce the impact of the activity of CSOs; there are more competition between CSOs than cooperation
  - beside the great enthusiasm of CSOs, which is a huge asset, most of them have weak organizational capacity and insufficient management skills, which reduces CSO's social impact
  - beside of the common lack of funding for CSOs, the CSOs are lacking the knowledge and skill on the alternative ways and techniques of income generation
  - young people show indifference to participate in civic activity and it is difficult to mobilize them for community purposes

The participants agreed that the Carpathian Platform and Hub is an efficient instrument to generate cooperation between CSOs at local and inter-regional level and change the culture of competition to the culture of cooperation. The importance to support capacity building of CSOs through trainings and intensive exchange programs was emphasized. The participants suggested setting up a “civil society panel”, (pop-up hub) within the Carpathian Platform to discuss the state of civil societies in the Carpathians and to develop policy recommendations.

After the group sessions a representative of each group reported the outcomes of the workshop to the whole audience.

The next session of the conference addressed the topic: **Sustainability of the Platform and inter-regional HUB**. Sándor Köles gave a presentation on the **strategy, structure, organization, business model and long term cooperation** of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform (for full presentation please see: <https://karpatnet.eu/node/33>)

Tibor Csathó and Márta Rakusz presented the **virtual HUB** to the participants – serving as an online platform for the member organizations of the Carpathian civil society platform - for contacting, sharing ideas, starting cooperation and working on joint projects. The site [www.karpatnet.eu](http://www.karpatnet.eu) was launched, and the main functions were presented. Participants were encouraged to sign up for the site to be able to start using the platform. (for full presentation please see: <https://karpatnet.eu/node/33>)

In the afternoon session participants discussed the co-creation of the Platform and the Hub in four groups.

#### **1. Functions, role, and services** - facilitated by Slavka Mačáková

- The workshop was attended by almost all participants of the previous workshop, and a staff member of the Romanian Embassy in Hungary also joined the workshop. A total number of participants was ten.
- The workshop program followed the presentation of Mr. Sandor Köles, which described the main points and areas of future development of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform. Participants gradually commented on various topics related to the future of the Platform.
- It is necessary to know more about the members of the platform - their mission, their scope, their area of interest and their activities within a specific national platform focusing on various areas/sectors/disciplines: housing, health, financial literacy, education, employment.
- The member's database needs to be updated on an annual basis.
- It would be useful to add the following features/information in the online Platform: "A list of demand and supply" of each organization
  - A list of localities, where the Platform members are located, where they operate, including a map
  - A database of experts on various areas of combating poverty should be established
- It has been agreed that a common language of communication is English
- The thematic group "*A Bridge from Generational Poverty*" will be led by ETP Slovakia
- In the area of advocacy, it would be useful to conduct joint campaigns in all countries at the same time.
- In order to fundraise for the implementation of the joint projects of the Carpathian Platform it is necessary to search at all levels, from the local to national and international EU.

#### **2. Organizational form and structure** – facilitated by Ruslan Zhystenko

15 participants from Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary took part in the thematic group.

During the groupwork four groups of issues related to the organizational form and structure of the Hub were discussed and conclusions were drawn:

##### **The relation between Platform's building blocks**

- In order to ensure non-hierarchy nature of the Hub, the National Platforms should be the source of decisions taken by International Platform.
- National Platforms do not ask for permissions but take decisions (which are in their competence) and only inform the International Platform.
- In most cases the decisions are initiated by National Platform and approved by International Platform.
- Besides the Council, the permanently operating, technical Secretariat (2-3 people) should be introduced. It will ensure swift and effective communication between different parts of the Hub and partners.

### **Membership rules**

- In general, the membership in the Hub should be opened.
- During the first period of Hub existence (e.g. for one year) it should be closed, until the clear membership criteria and requirements are developed.
- The only membership restriction is related to the geographical area. Nevertheless the participants split on defining this area: Carpathian region vs Carpathian Euroregion. This should be clarified.
- Most of the participants agreed that academia and local self-governance can be accepted in the Hub. Meanwhile, in respect to business the consensus has not been found. Some participants argued that business can be accepted under special conditions (higher membership fee, requirements on its social mission).
- Most of the participants argued for introduction of the membership fee. However it should be differentiated depending on type of organization (e.g. if business is accepted it should pay more).

### **Formalization of the Platform**

- The participants agreed that the International Platform should be formalized. Association has been considered as the most acceptable form.
- Most of the participants argued that besides mandatory registration documents, several other documents should be developed (those containing values, mission, membership, strategy).
- These “additional” documents should be proposed (developed) by National Platforms.
- The participants did not agree on decision making process in International Platform. The issue whether decisions should be taken by consensus or by simple majority left unresolved.

### **The governance of the Carpathian Platform**

- The participants agreed on Council as the main governing body.
- They proposed to introduce the permanently operating, technical Secretariat (2-3 people) which should ensure swift and effective communication between different parts of the Hub and partners.
- On one hand the participants argued that the members of Platform should be utmost represented in the Council. On the other hand, they think that formation of the Council should be as simple as possible.
- Recognizing diversity of the members of the Platform, the participants proposed to form the Council based on thematic approach (e.g. organizations dealing with rural development, Roma, etc.).
- Council participation should be based on rotation principle.

## **3. Virtual HUB – facilitated by Márta Rakusz and Tibor Csathó**

10 participants from Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary took part in the thematic group. (Same participants as in the thematic group – Group 4 – Power to the people)

During this session the group started to use the [www.karpatnet.eu](http://www.karpatnet.eu) online platform. Each participant registered as a first step. Then functions were tried (creating new group, organization, topic, event, newsfeed, comments, photos).

Participants created a new topic for the group – Power to the people. Participants agreed that they will continue to plan the Carpathian Youth Camp project there.

Participants agreed that they will continue to test all functions after the conference and give feedback to us on possible new functions, corrections, etc.

The virtual HUB will be further developed based on the feedback of users, participants.

## **4. Sustainability of the platform and the hub - facilitated by Maria Gajewska**

The group brainstormed about future steps to make the HUB and Platform sustainable. The conclusion was that sustainability is possible only with diversification of sources of income to make it stable and permanent. The group proposed to focus on one concrete task which would surely keep organizations connected and make them work together. The task will be to organize meeting in one year from time of Conference in the same place - Eger. The meeting can be organized based on karpatnet.eu platform which is great tool for taking such action by partners and hubbers from different countries. The

conclusion was that focusing on the organization of one event can start annual meetings tradition and also have influence of setting the leadership and capital of Platform - constant or portable.

Following the groups sessions short summaries were given to the whole audience on each groupwork on the co-creation of the platform topic.

As a joint declaration of the platform Sándor Köles presented the **Cooperation Protocol** (<https://karpatokalapitvany.hu/en/node/2777>) which was drafted by the partners based on the outcomes and experiences from previous activities with the organizations. It was agreed that an online form of the Protocol will be shared with the participants who were invited to join the Platform by signing the Protocol.

Sándor Köles summarized the conclusions of the process and closed the event.

Photos from the conference can be view here:

[https://www.facebook.com/pg/karpatokalapitvany/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=2428699610526324&ref=page\\_in ternal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/karpatokalapitvany/photos/?tab=album&album_id=2428699610526324&ref=page_internal)

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