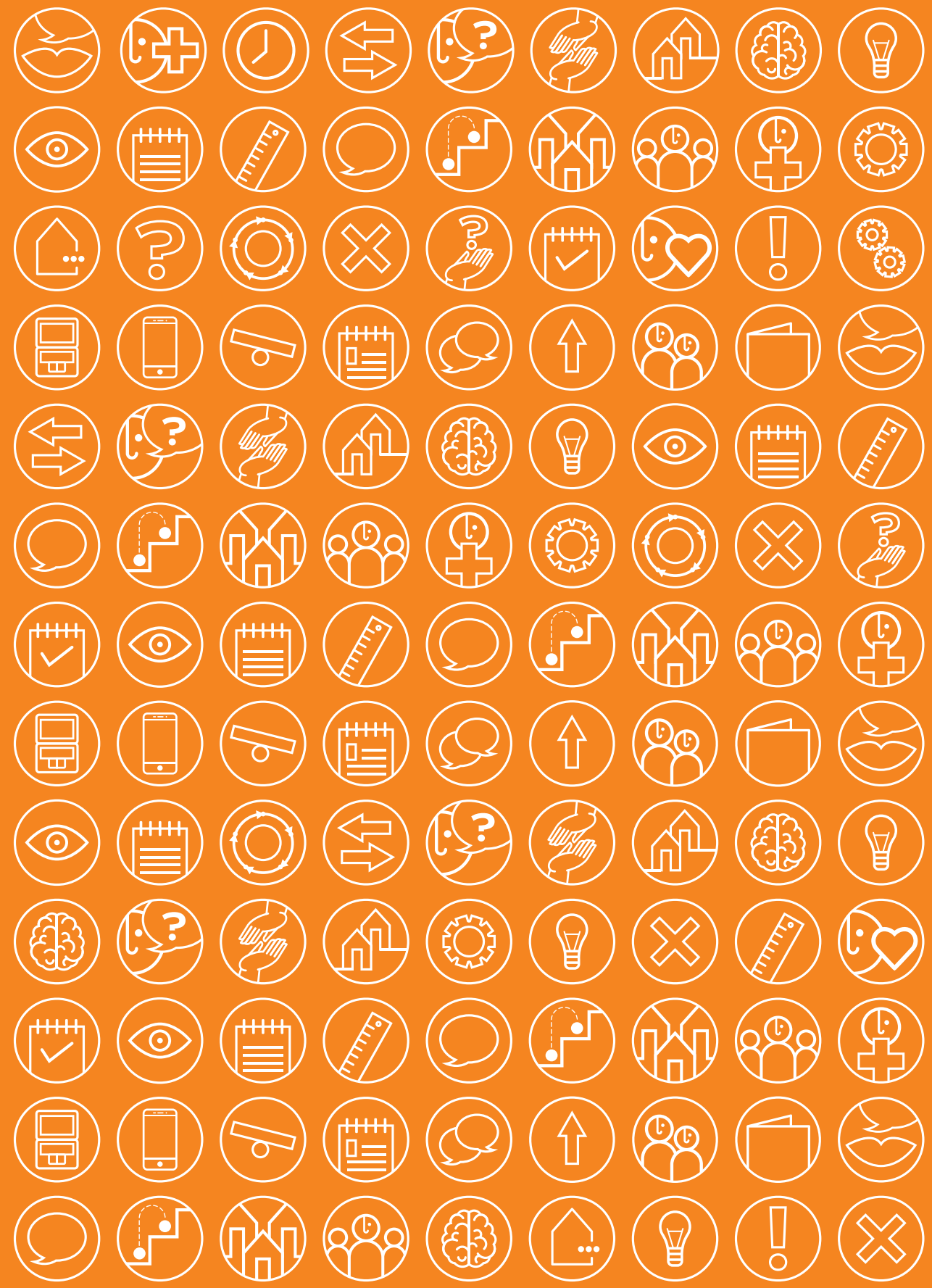
CHANGING THE PARADIGM

Reflections on Community Support in Three Central and Eastern European Non-profit Organizations

NADACE VIA

...lifting each other up. the only way to get to the aim is to help each other.

We can all live better and differently if we understand the people whom we are waiting for are us.

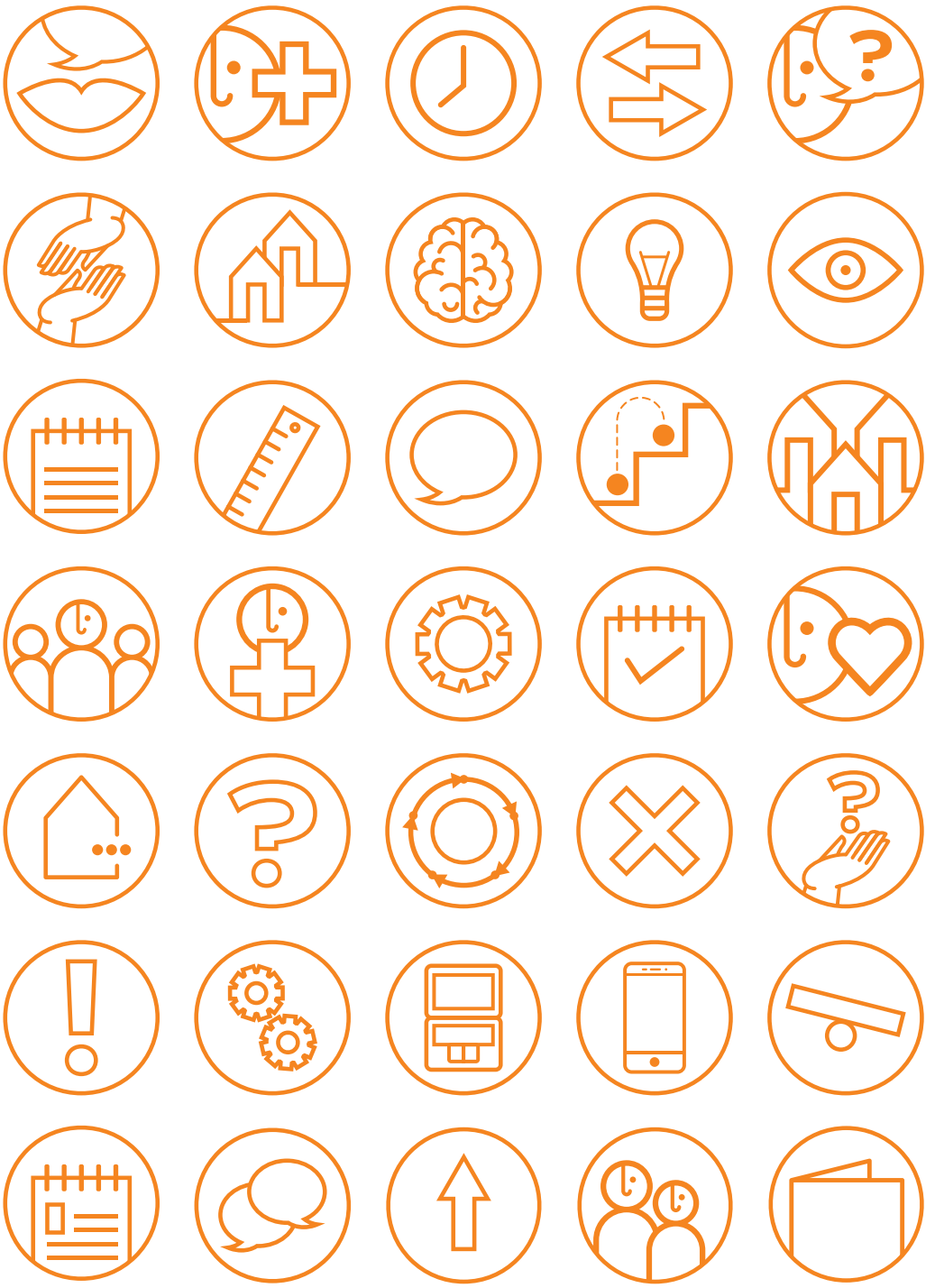


CHANGING THE PARADIGM

Reflections on Community Support in Three Central and Eastern European Non-profit Organizations

Monika Novosadová, Helen Lenda
Foreword by Lenka Dušková

> **“...lifting each other up. the only way to get to the aim is to help each other.**
>
> **We can all live better and differently if we understand the people whom we are waiting for are us.”**



CONTENTS

FOREWORD

This report was produced by practitioners engaged in strengthening community building processes and supporting people and organizations that are active within such processes. It was born as an initiative from the field responding to the compelling need to know the context better, know more about what is available in the field (ideas, experiences, resources), know what works and needs to be sustained, and find out what challenges are widespread in the communities and what strategies have accumulated within the localized knowledge (sometimes even without people being aware of them). In other words, the assessment was done to help develop the new program informed by the "evidence-based approach" – a buzz phrase of the current times that many people (from practitioners to funders) find theoretically essential and yet it produces many hesitations and often also some fears. These might be related a perceived lack of essential research capacities, time, and energy needed to conduct a proper assessment and to later implement the findings in practice.

For me, a researcher invited to advise during this process, it has been a really interesting time observing this report being created. I really enjoyed letting myself be surprised yet once again seeing how much can be discovered and learned from such a process about: i) the communities, ii) ourselves in relation to the way we observe the world around us, and iii) how different such observation can be when we do it systematically, applying some of the research-oriented approaches that go beyond the surface. Although there is always a dilemma of how much structure and rigor should be applied to learn more and how much, on the other hand, it might actually take away from the time available for genuine community/project work. I learned that the amount of time and the degree of rigor of application of the methods need to be negotiated among those involved in the process, otherwise it works against the motivation and quality of the results. The use of method(s) is only one important aspect, the will and genuine curiosity to ask questions and get the answers to the questions is equally, if not even more, im-

portant. It's about finding the balance. It's about the genuine listening skills when engaging with the field. It's about facing the mirror and asking ourselves whether i) we try to see beyond the obvious, ii) we are not only waiting to confirm what we already know, iii) we are able to imagine there are blank spaces in our knowledge about the context and the community that might be filled with the new information brought in by different people. We need to collect the diverse information first, before we can start working with it in an effective way. I was curious to find out how it can be done in a mutually reinforcing way – learning more in a systematic way in order to improve the practice in a feasible way. I have also learned that the trust in the existing capacities of the practitioners to inquire in the communities is important. People dispose of the tools to be used to learn the new information. So it is actually more about taking the decision – "yes, it's useful to know more" – and then about structuring the information and systematizing it a bit more to see beyond the obvious. I also learned how important it is to divide the roles and responsibilities while engaging in the hands-on-research for practice, using the different available capacities and time of the people and, moreover, valuing the time invested as an organization (team). This requires not only building on the skills and capacities of the practitioners that are already there and may be adjusting them a bit towards more systematic approach, but also to transform the researcher´s jargon into language and descriptions known in the practice to be able to find the common ground for planning and doing the assessment(s).

I invite you to dive deeper into the report, where the outcomes of the initial assessments of the understanding of the realities of the three different community-support organizations in Central and Eastern Europe are compiled and shared with you as well as the ideas, thoughts and discoveries about the collaborative research process in practice including inspiration by the community practitioners to the community practitioners.

Lenka Dušková

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: The why's and what's of this report

The first idea of conducting what we then called "initial assessments" – interviews with people working with or for three organizations – came along with developing a new program: Community Alphabet. What was clear at that point was that the program should focus on organizations and on increasing their capacity to support local communities. Three organizations had already expressed interest in joining the program: Trag, a foundation supporting local initiatives in Serbia; KöFe (HACD in English), the Hungarian Association for Community Development; and our "home base", Via Foundation, which supports local communities in the Czech Republic. The assessments were meant originally to help us, the team developing the new program, become informed about the specific circumstances in which the three organizations operate and what these specifics could mean for our program. While analysing all the collected data, we realized it would be a missed opportunity not to share our findings with others as there were so many interesting discoveries that had begun speaking to us from the data. Thus, we started to compile this report. If you happen to be considering going through a similar process, you will find our learning points at the end of the conclusions.

This report is a synthesis of what we learned during the interviews. Each chapter focuses on a different topic that we discovered. The topics are organized according to the following logic: we start by looking at the focus of the three organizations' work in support of local communities or other initiatives (i.e. key principles, approaches, values); move on to how they do that work (i.e. processes, program settings, organizational culture); and next look at the assets that have arisen from their work as well as the challenges they face. We follow with the context in which the organizations operate and from there we discuss some of these challenges which have already been tackled and turned into intentions or strategies that are being put into practice, and also those that translate into "wishes" i.e. how the respondents would like their work to develop in the future. We include a chapter on diversity before providing our final conclusions.

To make reading easier, and because the chapters can be read as independent units, we briefly summarize each one here. Chapter 1, ***Approach***, looks at the respondents' and organizations' thinking and approaches to working with local communities. It summarizes the reasoning behind the work that the organizations and respondents do, how the thinking developed and what values and principles underpin it.

The second chapter, ***Process of supporting communities***, follows with a look at the practice of supporting local communities. It looks at the ways, tools and methods the organizations and respondents use, the effects that they see happening in the communities as a consequence and issues that appear along the way.

Next, chapter 3, ***Organizational structure and culture***, focuses on the internal functioning of the three organizations. It brings together various aspects of organizational culture that we heard respondents speak about, including the roles the organizations, programs and individuals take on as perceived both from within the organizations and from the outside, specifically by grantees (i.e. individuals, initiatives, groups or organizations that benefit from financial and other support the three organizations offer).

The fourth chapter, ***Resources***, centres around one of the key issues in the Community Alphabet program – assets. We found it important to show how many resources or assets develop or appear while working with communities. We structured the chapter by first looking at how respondents perceive resources and then we present other facets through questions about the quantity, creation, use or recreation of resources in communities.

Chapter 5, ***Success and satisfaction***, relates elements of success and satisfaction that respondents perceive while working with local communities. Next, in chapter 6, ***Challenges***, we focus on the opposite end of the spectrum: issues that sometimes create dilemmas in the work of the organizations. Each dilemma is presented in a separate subsection with a headline naming two contradictory topics that, in the respondents' view, somehow conflict with each other. There are two exceptions to the rule in this chapter where challenges are embedded in the issue itself: namely, polarization and longevity, where the challenges are connected to the fact that the organizations support communities from the outside, which naturally brings certain limitations.

To close our discussion of the current state of affairs, chapter 7, ***Context***, summarizes outside influences on the organizations and communities. It describes how various contextual aspects affect the organizations and communities, from historical context to current local and national circumstances and cooperation with partners, both within the respective countries and abroad.

Chapter 8, ***Changing the paradigm***, is directed towards the future, summarizing the organizations' intentions, visions and aspirations, as well as the strategies that they have already started putting in place based on the lessons they have learned, many of which are mentioned in the previous chapters.

Chapter 9, ***Diversity***, explores one of our major interests in developing the program. Looking at ways of supporting diversity as a resource rather than a problem is one of the main points of the Community Alphabet program. This chapter looks at how diversity is perceived by the respondents and their organizations and summarizes different ways of

dealing with the issue, including the notion of personal experience as a starting point for dealing with diversity.

Chapter 10, ***Conclusions***, presents our final thoughts.

At this point it might also be useful to introduce the Community Alphabet program that our team has been developing and for which the interview findings have provided an elemental source of inspiration and reflection. The intention of Via Foundation's Community Alphabet program is to introduce Asset-based community development (ABCD)[1], community resilience[2] and diversity sensitivity approaches to the program managers and consultants of three Central and Eastern European (CEE) national-level community support organizations – KöFe, Trag and Via – and help them integrate these approaches into their community support programming. The theory of change is that by adopting a combination of these approaches, the organizations will be able to help supported communities make better use of local resources, consider their own resilience and work towards an inclusive approach to community building.

A. Context

These three organizations have been supporting communities in the CEE region for 20+ years. They met during the ViabilityNet 3.0 program, in which they identified polarization as a major shared concern for communities in the region. Community Alphabet developed out of that concern and draws on Via Foundation's long-standing experience and expertise in sharing community building approaches, inter alia through the ViabilityNet 3.0 program component that supported local community leaders.

Many of the specific characteristics that define the CEE region came to the surface during the data analysis and are woven into the report; just a note here they may be very

[1]Asset-based community development (ABCD) is based on the idea that communities can lead their own development by identifying and mobilizing local assets. For a definitive text please see: Kretzmann, John P. and McKnight, John L. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, 1993.

[2]Community resilience is the ability to use local resources to deal with, adapt to and recover from adverse situations. We use Longstaff's community resilience framework as a tool; please see Longstaff, Patricia H. et al. "Building Resilient Communities: A Preliminary Framework for Assessment." *Homeland Security Affairs* 6, Article 6 (September 2010). https://www.hsaj.org/articles/81.

familiar or very foreign to readers, depending on their own cultural context.

B. Methodology

Between February and May 2020, we conducted 28 individual and small group interviews with staff and practitioners affiliated with Trag, KöFe and Via (8 interviews in Hungary, 10 in the Czech Republic and 10 in Serbia). Each interview was approximately 1.5 hours long and we conducted a combination of group interviews, solo interviews and mind mapping exercises. The interviews were recorded and the 65 hours of conversation were transcribed and then coded using Atlas software.

Our target interviewees were staff and practitioners who have experience with supporting local communities. We wanted to find a diversity of respondents who work in different roles: managers of various programs in the organizations at different levels and practitioners directly involved in supporting grassroots community work or local community leaders. Their roles may be described as:

- program managers: people responsible for administering programs that support local community development
- directors or managers of the organizations
- consultants/advisors: people who work with communities on an external basis. They might act as facilitators of participatory processes, trainers during educational events or mentors for community leaders, project teams or local organizations engaged in development of specific communities

Even though these were the roles we initially described, during the interviews we discovered that many of the respondents have also served communities in other roles in the past or do so at present. We also found that some of them fulfill multiple roles simultaneously, for example on one hand working as staff members of the organizations, while also being engaged in their own local community or involved in other initiatives as volunteers in their free time.

Since our intention was to hold interviews in three different countries with different audiences, we asked the three organizations, KöFe, Trag and Via, to help us contact some of the potential interviewees.

C. Key questions

The key areas we explored during the interviews were the current practice of the organizations in supporting communities; why and how the three organizations help local communities become more resilient; and perceptions of, and approaches to, diversity. Specifically, we looked at:

- the values underpinning the three organizations' work;
- their approaches to supporting communities;
- their goals in this work;
- who and what influences program development;
- what is working well and where the respondents see challenges;
- perceptions of diversity and approaches to supporting diversity; and
- external influences on the organizations.

D. Terminology

At times in this report we use vocabulary that is grounded in our practice. To clarify what we mean, we provide a summary of the terminology that you will find throughout the report.

Grantees: individuals, initiatives or organizations engaged in community development which receive support from one of the three organizations.

Program: an established way of providing support to grantees. Some of the programs primarily provide financial support while others have an educational focus or are based on a set of interventions in communities.

Local community: a place-based community with clear geographical boundaries in which people can have face-to-face interaction with one another.

Program managers: staff members responsible for administering the above-mentioned programs. This includes people with diverse responsibilities and slightly different roles.

Consultants/advisors: individuals hired, usually on an external basis, to carry out direct support and/or interventions in communities within the scope of the programs. Some of the consultants enter a given community only once, while others focus on long-term

interventions and act as facilitators and/or guides to grantees during specific projects. In some cases consultants/advisors also run training courses or educational events where they meet with groups of grantees or community leaders at once.

CHAPTER 1

1. Approach

During the interviews we heard many practical examples of how communities are supported, some of which are mentioned in this chapter. This chapter mainly focuses on the thinking behind such practice. Many respondents reflected on the meaning of what they do and the elements that have influenced the development of their approach. They also spoke about the values and principles underpinning their work as integral components which provide meaning to the specific tools, activities or programs they work on.

1.1 Principles and lessons learned

1.1.1 Listen to the field

Through the interviews, we learned that being close to the field is a core value shared by the organizations, yet they often struggle to fulfill this practically. Several respondents said that they gain insight into real-world community issues through site visits to grantees' projects and grantee selection processes. At the same time, we heard a clear call for greater connection between office and field from several respondents. They said that their organizations want to increase their field presence to be more connected to grantees and more aware of the situations and issues they face. Several interviewees mentioned a recent program evaluation that revealed, according to one respondent, a "need to listen more to the organizations, to their needs, to them…". Following on this thought, some respondents expressed that they had grown detached from field reality over the years, gradually turning into "office rats" without a firm grasp of grantees' daily struggles. We also heard, from consultants who advise community groups supported by the organizations, that some recent programming innovations did not fit the reality in grantee communities, which are typically small and rural.

We learned that the organizations are responding by emphasizing development of personal (working) relationships with grantees, conducting evaluations to get structured feedback from grantees, increasing staff time in the field and exploring different ways of having what one respondent named a "regional presence".

1.1.2 Letting go and trusting communities

The theme of shifting the power arose in a number of interviews; it centers around placing more trust in grantees and is grounded in the principle that "organizations are the experts". Many respondents mentioned, in different ways, that they find it crucial to see people in local communities as local experts and to trust that locals know best what works in their own communities.

As one respondent explained, in her organization shifting the power has translated into an experiment with participatory grantmaking: instead of an expert selection committee, a group of grant applications in a particular field decide which of them should be awarded the grant. Other respondents shared how they are trying to increase trust in grantees by reducing financial reporting requirements for micro-grants. In this case, we were told,

when the organization awards a micro-grant to a group with which it has previous experience, it simply trusts the grantee to use the money as proposed and does not ask for any accounting. We heard, however, that there is a flipside to trusting, in that some grantees may abuse this freedom and that it is difficult to find the balance between trusting grantees and holding them accountable [see more in Challenges below].

1.1.3 Diversified approach to grantees

Through the interviews we learned that over the years, the organizations have built arrays of support tools. They offer different combinations of tools to different groups and/or customize support on a case-by-case basis because they have realized that grantee situations differ substantially, thus requiring different tools. One respondent described how her staff tries to individualize support from the very first contact: "When a potential applicant calls, we find out what their situation is, then offer them something from our programming (apply for a small grant, or a seminar, mentoring, networking) without talking up front about our programs."

Several respondents noted that as their organizations move away from a "one size fits all" approach, they are stressing the importance of building relationships with grantees to better identify what they can offer a given grantee. To facilitate this, there has been experimentation with assigning each program manager specific grantees with whom s/he communicates throughout the support period, and also increasing site visits and other forms of contact. Respondents told us that this effort to meet specific needs can continue even after the support period, when the organization can "help [the grantee] with whatever struggle comes next, provide additional resources."

1.1.4 Beyond funding

Building relationships with grantees and approaching each one individually seems to be important to the respondents as it creates an environment of trust in which experience sharing and consultations may dominate over funding. We heard: "…As soon as we visit them, they lose their fear of calling us up or writing for advice and that makes our work much more about sharing experience and the grant becomes secondary." In this case, the respondent told us that the organization wants to go beyond being primarily a funding provider for some grantees. She talked about "…spreading the ideas of the foundation not only by distributing money, but focusing more on what we can influence, like for example

when a progressive mayor who wants to develop community life has the finances and just doesn't know how to do it, that's the way to spread our mission, not just in the form of money." She mentioned consultations, stakeholder mapping, online fundraising tools and discussions about how to raise additional funding as other forms of support the organization could offer.

1.1.5 Importance of connectivity

This theme appeared in the interviews in various forms: as connectivity among individuals, among groups, with other organizations, through building platforms and by being a bridge. One respondent explained the emergence of a highly influential "movement building mindset" in her organization that emphasizes connecting organizations across a field for impact on two levels, firstly to strengthen the field as a whole and secondly to enrich the specific players through new contacts information or skills: "...Another important thing in this strategic direction is looking at everything from the movement building perspective – it's kind of looking at the importance of common work, of connectivity... try to make as many events, conveyings where people can actually bring themselves together and or what we would do is we would match them at some point, say you got to talk to this organization or this community because their approach might work in your community or they have some kind of capacity that you could use. For instance, we matched organizations that are really good at volunteer management with the ones that aren't, but have this need."

Several respondents said that a key goal is fostering connections between people in a given community and cultivating the collaboration that follows. One described it in this way: "...So that...new events would start to emerge there, or at least so that the people support each other, when suddenly they had someone from the pensioners' club on the team, so that some natural greater symbiosis would begin to emerge there."

It seemed that the community's initial level of connectivity shaped the respondent's expectations for a given project. This was reflected in one respondent's comment that communities differ in how strongly connected they are initially: "And there are differences. There are places where these associations work together and the leaders of these associations have done so for years, and they know who and what to do. And then I see a group that is excited, but actually doesn't know the other clubs that much, and it will be a first step for them."

This held true for connectivity within a core group leading a project. We heard, analogously, that the level of connectivity at the beginning of the project helps determine how much further they can be expected to go: "Either it is one association, where there are 3-4 people who have really good relationships with each other and suddenly they have to open up to something else in the program, which for me is a step towards the emergence of other new events. Or they just come together, a diverse group, thanks to this project and then they continue together."

Several respondents envisioned their organizations as bridges between citizens, NGOs, businesses and initiatives, and in some cases professionals. One said: "...[We are] trying to help find different languages that can be used at different levels – people, organizations that work with communities whether it's the experts or field experts, and be a bridge between different levels and facilitate communication between them."

1.1.6 Experimentation

This theme revolves around questions such as: How does an organization explore and how does it integrate experimental approaches into its work? What is the impetus for experimentation? Is the organization encouraged to experiment? By whom? How much does an organization experiment vs. how much does it rely on the tried and true?

We heard that in some cases, a donor has been the driver for experimentation: "Our donor is really understanding and understands experimentation and pushes us to innovate." This respondent described how this donor approach enables experimentation in grantmaker methods: "...We've been able to have the space to try out some new methodologies, so we tried participatory grantmaking, which again is embedded in the shift of power. So basically as a grantmaker you let the applicants, the field decide who gets the grant. And it's something that is let's say a very innovative approach, not just here in the region, we were the only ones doing that, it is quite experimental at this point. I think there are maybe 8–10 foundations worldwide that did this…".

Other respondents told us that findings from evaluations and working groups sometimes lead to experimentation with new components in long-standing programs. While the space to be creative and propose ideas is largely appreciated, we also saw that a polarity between innovation and consistency emerged [see chapter 6, Challenges].

1.1.7 Resource mobilization as an approach

Some respondents noted that resource mobilization is a defining principle in their organization's approach, while others said they are struggling to reflect it in their work. Several respondents said that helping communities recognize and use local resources is an integral part of how they help build strong communities. It is viewed as a cornerstone of their community support approaches, which employ tools such as matching grants, mentoring about building fundraising human resources and online giving tools, and yet it is also seen as challenging to implement consistently, as we will discuss further on.

In one organization we learned that adopting a resource activation approach has been a gradual process. A respondent noted: "As we went along we saw many benefits of accessing resources: not just material or financial, but literally building constituency, support, being more independent and relevant." In her organization, valuing resource mobilization translates into guidance for grantees; they are "trained how to do community building as well, how to recognize assets, resources in the community, networks of support, who their allies are – kind of like community mapping." Here training is followed by mentoring to guide grantees in viewing resources strategically longer-term, creating fundraising teams and/or internal resources, or investing time in strategic fundraising.

Other respondents told us that their organizations sometimes use a resource activation approach, but not consistently, or that they tend to combine it with a needs-oriented approach. One interviewee described her approach, which poses the following questions at the beginning of a community planning effort: "What are the values? What are the problems? What can you do for that?", thus fusing both resources and needs in a single approach. Another respondent said her organization's approach tends to migrate from resources-based at the outset of interaction with a grantee to needs-based when it comes to actual provision of support: "We do a neat job mapping resources and then we ask them what they need, and we give them that. We combine both approaches."

Interestingly, while the examples above demonstrate that the resource mindset is not universally present in the organizations' support of grantees, we definitely heard it when respondents spoke of their personal involvement in staff or community teams. One interviewee described an emphasis on assets in the civic association in which she is active in her free time: "Our cooperation in the association is based on sharing what each of us knows how to do". Another saw the differences between staff members as a resource: "It can just be beneficial in that you somehow complement each other, because everyone has a slightly different way of thinking". In other words, it seems that the resource mindset

is there on a personal level but is not fully translated to the organizational level across the board.

1.1.8 Leading grantees towards sustainability

Promoting sustainability of community activities or groups was a theme that arose repeatedly as something that the respondents find important to their work. Our discussions on this topic revolved around how to help grantees become self-sufficient, how long to do that, and also what self-sufficiency in a community group really means.

Some respondents indicated that the way to develop sustainability may be through mobilization of local resources and described how their organization has developed schemes of long-term grants coupled with skill building to this end. Another respondent shared how her organization guides grantees in making use of local resources through challenge grants: "We just did some exit processes that were quite successful – we gave a challenge grant to build reserves, where they had to mobilize resources. They really opened up…".

In the interviews, we also broached the question of how to define sustainability, for we were eager to know what respondents saw as the point at which support should end, at which an organization would be sufficiently ready to go on without outside guidance. We found it important to understand this in regard to our focus on assets in the Community Alphabet program, for finding a balance between helping a community group grow and sending it off on its own can be difficult. As a respondent said: "[We are] there to give you a bit of wings and blow into them a bit, but it's you who needs to do the flying and then let us know what you saw when you were flying around." Another respondent said that in her organization, the goal is usually defined as independence in terms of finance, human resources and capacity but the question of how much support is enough remains unanswered.

1.2 Internal values underpinning the approach

From the principles and approaches described above, we identified a number of values that appear central to the respondents' work.

1.2.1 Identity as a source: social interactions at the heart of change

The idea of community identity as a resource for community building emerged in a number of interviews. One way that it came up was letting communities define themselves, rather than dictating what size or shape they should take; a respondent spoke of how her organization handles this: "We let them self-determine, whether it's a neighborhood or community, town or region."

From others we heard that identity is an important resource, for when people view their community as the place where they belong, they are more willing to dedicate energy to improving it: "I expect that, ideally, it will help move people towards a perception of the community as their home, in which it pays to invest. That it's not just a place where you sleep or some kind of emergency thing that I'm there. But that I take a look around and say, yeah, there are actually a lot of interesting things here that I enjoy, too, and I'm interested in, and I can find some sort of self-fulfillment here."

She went on to explain how she believed joining in or influencing the community make people feel rooted to a place, and that this conviction had been borne out in talks with grantees: "It makes a lot of sense to me that where something is happening or I have the opportunity to be a part of it, or create something, and my voice is heard, I have my place there, that is an essential part of me caring about the place and wanting to live there. And when we called the grantees before Christmas, some said that because something was happening there, people were starting to return."

1.2.2 It's about people

A people focus – the importance of individuals and their interactions – was a theme that emerged repeatedly and which we saw reflected in the emphasis on relationships and trust between individuals in a community as critical elements of functioning communities, and also in the organizations' efforts to strengthen the capacity of specific community leaders.

One person viewed social capital as the basis for community development in every case: "For me, there are two types of projects. They either have people and they lack a place to meet. These are revitalization projects, the creation of community centers, the reconstruction of a room in the town hall into something and so on. They have people

there, they have the social capital and they have no place. Or vice versa. Actually, no, they always have to have the people."

Another went further, noting that besides engaged people themselves, two types of personal relationships are critical to community development. In her view, it is the "relationships between the people and also the relationship of those people to the village..." that are essential to making change.

Another respondent explained how his organization had gradually began to emphasize support of specific, key community leaders: "...Another big milestone was that we started supporting people, before we didn't consciously say that our partner is the specific person in the village; it was a moment that got written into the DNA of the foundation and remains there. Specific people were the final piece in our thinking about what it means to support community development. John Gardner – 10 ingredients – he has it in there: you work with young people, you work with leaders, with your past and your future, you are not isolated, you work with communities from which you can learn."

Another respondent also stressed people and relationships when speaking of how she viewed the organization in which she works. It seemed that her belief in her colleagues' abilities and reliability were important to her perception of work: "I think we have capable people, independent. That it seems to me that it's up to those people. I feel like I can count on it."

1.2.3 Leading with humility

Another key value mentioned was leading with humility, which means listening to grantees and applicants and being a partner rather than just a donor or grant administrator. One respondent described why she finds it significant: "I think how we do things is important. How we build relationships and how we look at the power differential between the donor and grantees is crucially important because – and that's probably me embedding a lit bit of my leftee mindset – generally it has been kind of proven in practice that if you lead with some kind of humility, towards your not prescribing, not directing everything, the impact is, and the outcomes, that come from it are definitely more genuine and more authentic... in terms of the context."

According to one respondent, this approach is closely bound to an ethics of care, which is grounded in humanity and empathy with grantees. Describing the fabric of her organiza-

tion, she said: "Then [we have] the focus on clients…on grantees. We focus a lot on care, which is what makes us a foundation, meaning a support organization that is human and cares for both employees and the people we help."

In another interview, this ethics of care was described as trying to understand grantees' real-life situations, accommodate their needs and be partners to them. In this respondent's view, it is about opening "space for conversations rather than prescribing different grids or log frames", and taking the time to listen and be present along grantees' journeys, even after grant support ends.

Another respondent who also spoke about this type of guidance acknowledged that is a lengthier, often more complicated interaction, but that it can give the program manager a window into a grantee's needs: "...It's about personal contact, so you can make a better decision about whether they need it or they don't need it."

Approaching the donor-grantee relationship with humility is also tied to another value: acknowledging grantee organizations as experts. This, we heard, is about recognizing that a local organization knows its own community best and should choose its own approach to create the change it wants to see and set its own goals. One respondent put it this way: "We take the mindset of shifting the power and saying 'you are the experts' in what you do. We are the ones to provide the spaces and learning from what we hear from you."

This view emphasizes careful listening, creating opportunities in line with grantee feedback and helping grantee-organizations implement their own ideas. However, sometimes we as the interviewers sensed a push and pull between a grantee-organization's goals and a support provider's goals.

1.2.4 The power of collective action

Standing together, lifting each other up: we heard that the power of collaborative community work to make change is a core credo of all three organizations. Alongside the recognition that individuals matter, as described above, here we see interactions and the outcomes of interactions as key elements: "But why I chose this is the word partnership, it is about the people coming together and creating the space for dialogue and creating, coming forward with something which is the fruit of the consensus building. This is us, with our partners, but this is the way how we do it, in general, also to support the commu-

nities. It's how to build this critical mass of partnership and mutual support."

The significance of joint action was expressed by another respondent as collective intelligence, where no single person enters a community dialogue with the answers in advance. Instead, she said, the beauty of community planning processes is that the answer, or the shape of the project in this case, emerges from the space that is created between the community members: "It is a collective work, a collective intelligence, [where] the space for that value lies in the broad field of knowledge and experience of individual actors and the strength is to indulge in the shared work, to indulge in that openness, I really listen to what others bring to that space so that I am able to retreat from my own ideas in favor of the value that is collective, which I humbly perceive here."

1.2.5 Support and solidarity

Solidarity was noted by some respondents as an important value, but it appeared from two quite different angles: the first was about showing solidarity to grantees and the second was about the power of solidarity in society.

In the first case, some interviewees used the word solidarity to mean providing support for growth within communities and being open and understanding their needs, or even trusting them to spend funding as promised. This was presented as a fairly recent and positive development within the given organization's mindset, albeit not without a risk of abuse by some grantees who may use funding for purposes other than those stated.

In the second case, we heard that civil society can motivate people, and provide opportunities for them to act in solidarity with others. We heard that during devastating floods "even people who weren't directly affected by the floods showed solidarity and helped others." At the same time, this respondent noted that the current focus on individualism in society makes it hard to get people to engage in their communities. In her words: "Yes, currently our economic and political system is more individualistic, so they are telling us we need to compete for everything and...Solidarity is not something that is valued. But I think that such systems at one moment must change because they can't function like that."

1.2.6 Flexibility and adaptability

Several respondents emphasized the importance of being flexible when providing support, recognizing that situations in communities are constantly changing and approaches have to be continuously adapted. Speaking of a new program, one respondent said: "The community foundation program will require flexibility, adaptability. [There is] no "one size fits all" when it comes communities. Once you start working with organizations on the ground, it's tailor made to the context, the organizations, the beneficiaries they are working with."

Another respondent described how flexibility is built into the organization's grantmaking process. She told us that after each grant call, the staff reviews the pool of applicants, looking at which communities were or were not represented and which issues applicants sought to address, and staff then adjusts their outreach for the next call. She explained these adaptations: "So we would either go into info sessions in the communities that haven't been [represented] or try targeting our communication differently. So learning by doing is very important."

1.2.7 Trust

Trust was a frequent theme that seemed woven into many of the issues raised by respondents. Often it was about the respondent building trust with grantees, or about how grants can be a form of trust or about trust between people in a community as a fundamental value to uphold and nurture.

Most frequently, respondents mentioned trust in relation to the **importance of developing relationships with grantees**. One explained that relationships based on trust give grantees the courage to turn to program managers for guidance and/or contacts, even years after project support has ended in some cases: "…It's harder, it's much harder work from the grantmaker perspective and the processes are longer, that we do a lot of process stuff, but we build stronger relationships as a part of that and trust. So for example if you supported someone for six months, you can call them up five years later and say, listen, I want you to talk to this person…and they jump on this opportunity."

Some respondents saw grants as an expression of trust and also a means of developing grantees' trust in their own changemaker capability. One respondent described the purpose of grants as follows: "It is intended to encourage people to take an active approach

to their surroundings and we give them the confidence that they can do it and that it's possible. It is intended as support for engaged people who want to do something, and to **give them confidence that they can do it, that we believe in them, that we support them**."

Trust as a resource was another aspect of this theme. One respondent, reflecting on how his organization had gradually earned the trust of major donors, considered trust in itself to be a great resource.

Another respondent cited trust as a key element of well-functioning communities. Conversely, lack of trust was repeatedly listed as a widely experienced problem that hampered community development; one respondent cited that among people in his country there is an "enormous lack of trust. Well now it's going also on an individual level but it's more towards the institutions, foreign initiatives, NGOs, all those that are telling us that everything will be okay and democratic when they finish their project."

In his view, this dearth of trust is leading people to search for trust in their very immediate surroundings and in face-to-face interactions: "People are going to the micro-level now: searching for some hope and trust; to the neighbourhood, very small local community, most positive initiatives that started without a call or political party, are around a neighborhood. Some are developing in not the best ways, others are continuing to organize for the neighborhood level. People are searching for trust in very local communities – they would dedicate time and trust with those who they can see."

1.2.8 Openness, transparency

Alongside trust, respondents listed openness as a highly regarded value within organizations, in their approaches to grantees, and in communities.

A number of respondents appreciated a culture of openness in their organizations which enables them to pursue ideas freely: "It seems to me that transparency and openness are very important here. That you can talk about anything, in my opinion, is a form of support of individual employees and you are free to be creative and develop things. You can come up with any idea and no one will negate it, you can talk about it. So here you can develop your ideas, introduce your thoughts and develop them."

In relation to grantees, we heard that program managers try to be open to supporting

grantees in various ways. One respondent said: “NGOs know we are ready to help them beyond what’s stated in the contract or project cycle, their formal requirements to fulfill. We are very open at the entry point (consultations, advice, connections) and throughout the process (implementing a certain program or giving institutional support, funding) and once this process is over (help with whatever they may struggle with next, provide additional resources)”. One of her colleagues described the organization’s approach towards various types of grantees in similar terms: “Our approach is more bottom-up and open; opening the potential of support and cooperation towards various organizations.”

Finally, in relation to communities, two respondents talked about promoting open and civilized community dialogue in which every voice is heard and encouraging grantees to open their projects to everyone in the community.

CHAPTER 2

2. Process of supporting communities

When speaking with respondents about how they support communities, several clusters appeared. One cluster of descriptions focused on the process of providing support and the types of interactions that appear or are intentionally fostered with grantees. Another cluster of respondent descriptions revolved around the content of such interactions and issues that arise during them, and a third cluster included reflections connected to ways in which interactions are supported.

As we turn to these clusters, it is worth noting two specific focus areas of support that appeared. The first is connected to building relationships and creating community social capital while the other concentrates on the physical aspects of community development. In the latter, improvement of public spaces to support social interactions was mentioned as highly important several times. Another focal area that came into play was local fundraising and making use of locally available resources, which many respondents mentioned as becoming a more embedded part of the programs they are involved in. It appeared that local fundraising is not a goal in itself, but rather a tool to support grantees and their communities in becoming aware of how many resources they have at their disposal to build the social network in communities and a feeling of self-awareness and self-confidence.

2.1 Support of communities through:

2.1.1 Planting seeds

A key support concept described by respondents was nurturing initial sparks of community life to help them grow into impactful community entities. The idea of helping emerging groups and initiatives was likened to cultivating seeds and gardens: **"Everything is about how you seed something and help it to grow."** Community support was also likened to "...a type of garden **where you plant seeds that are small, some grow more, some grow less**, those that have some kind of potential, or various elements that are beneficial for the situation, they have continued to grow using some of our other programs or some other people's programs and have really managed to establish themselves in their communities in the meantime."

Continuing the metaphor, we also heard that support also goes to seeds that have already sprouted and are ready for further growth: "I dare say that with most grantees, they've already done something somewhere like this [i.e. a community activity], even in a random way, really in a way that didn't cost anything much, but something that moved the community forward. **So for some it's a start from scratch, but I think that's a minority of grantees, and more often it's a move from something small to a bigger event.**" In these cases, a grant can provide the seedling group with "confirmation that they are doing something good, that it will move them a step further; it can give them energy and rejuvenate them and help them see where they can go next."

One respondent expressed gratification with growth in grantee skills while recognizing his organization's limited capacity to help those very grantees once they had advanced. He said: "So I'm very proud of that fundraising program because from year to year, **every group of organizations**, mostly 10, in one round of the program, **are (fund)raising faster and faster, always in some innovative ways** and **testing communities**" and then went on to comment that his organization is sometimes unable to offer programming for organizations that develop beyond a certain point as it is more geared to beginners.

Yet another aspect of nurturing was connected to providing opportunities to engage and experience that things can change and more importantly, that we as individuals can influence and change them. A respondent summed up his thoughts on this point by emphasizing: "Not only access to the system of change, but also access to changing the system of change."

2.1.2 Strengthening specific groups

Two respondents described how their organizations support specific groups, fields or segments of grantees in order to strengthen the given group, field or segment as a whole. The rationale was described by one respondent as follows: "…All of it is looked at from the prism of movement building. So the theory of change is if everyone, if the movement, the organizations are stronger, stronger connected, if there are spaces, and there are narratives that are used in the mainstream, then we will all basically be stronger".

Another respondent explained how sharing experiences across a specific group has value: "Because it's one thing we are trying to do, we have it founded largely on sharing experiences, sharing what we know how to do and passing it on. So, for example, we have created a time bank where we try to share what each of us knows how to do and it's a lot about stories, about sharing. That is why it is also women for women."

While vulnerable groups were not described by any respondent as a primary target group, some respondents recognized that these groups "cannot do business as usual" and may require adaptation of approaches. One organization has been experimenting with participatory grantmaking while recognizing that this tends to favor vulnerable people or groups and that it leads to a polarity of supporting the vulnerable over the innovative. In another setting, we learned that the organization is striving to include representatives of vulnerable groups on selection committees to ensure that their voices are heard.

Another respondent described how her organization has hesitantly taken some steps to support a specific vulnerable group but there is ambiguity within the organization about how to fit this into its larger mission. She said: "The foundation wants us to support more Roma projects and we decide whether we want to involve even more socially disadvantaged groups, for example, or whether we don't want to, and who our grantees actually are, and whether we want to target this area more or even talk about it externally."

2.1.3 Emphasis on relationships

We heard that strengthening relationships between individuals in a community is both a goal in itself and a means to further resilience. In the first case, one respondent told us that: "And then another minimum [goal] for me are the relationships. Another minimum is that they are satisfied with the transformation of the public space…and that we at the foundation **perceive that the relationships have developed, at least a little bit**."

From other respondents we heard this emphasis in relation to development of resilient communities: "Strengthening ties in that community. I just see there the model of those resilient communities, that this contributes to it in some way. The moment we talk about building a resilient community, this is one aspect – creating an environment that enables people to get involved. It's one of them."

2.1.4 Encouraging community-wide engagement

Several respondents described how they encourage grantees to foster broad community dialogue. In one case, we were told, this plays out through expectations: "We expect organizations to do everything in a participatory way." Another person related it to selection criteria, explaining that her organization gives "more points to projects that involve the wider community".

At the same time, several people said that broad engagement is a priority, but not a must: "We ask [applicants] about it but we do not push them into it." And, in fact, one respondent described instances when a grantee didn't want to involve the broad community in its project because, e.g. it was not accustomed to letting people into its circle or could not prepare the project adequately for all groups in the community. These situations, she said, are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

In another setting, we learned that an organization's efforts to engage all residents was met with resistance from partners in the community. A respondent related how the project had evolved: "...Originally they wanted to involve all of the people, but it's just a very big sports center for students, a very elite religious school; the previous director probably wanted to involve all the people, the poor people, but the subsequent director did not want to."

2.1.5 Advocacy and community building

Two strands of support stood out during the interviews: supporting communities to speak out and stand up for themselves, and helping them build relationships and trust among people. Sometimes they ran as two parallel lines – one political, the other social – that were clearly delineated as separate programs (one program supports advocacy and another community building efforts). Respondents noted the value of community building as a way of developing trust, while advocacy support was recognized as a way

to help grantees be heard: "We see that we are transferring their voice from the local to the national level because we have that power to do that."

In other interviews, these two areas were not clearly separated but rather mingled in a grey area. One example given was mayors who wear two different hats within their communities. A respondent explained how a mayor can be both a formal and an informal leader at once: "And at the same time, in some communities it's in the persona of the mayor, so s/he overlaps with the local government, and sometimes s/he is more of an informal leader who stands aside". Respondents described another example of where the social and the political had merged, which involved community leaders who had led community building projects and then gone on to become mayors, taking their community building mindset with them into office.

Other respondents mentioned that their organizations had tried to stay apolitical for years, until the context called for action, and that balancing the political-social line was tricky.

2.1.6 Physical change

One aspect of supporting communities that respondents repeatedly deemed important was starting with a community's existing resources, including material or physical resources. One program, and many supported projects from all three organizations, are built on the premise that creating visible, tangible change to a local public space through grassroots action can develop a sense of responsibility among residents. This is related to the notion that it is joint physical labor to transform a site that can bond people to one another and to the community as a place, a sort of home.

Hence, respondents explained that support often uses local, tangible issues to spark citizens' interest in the public sphere, such as: "Creating space for the people to express themselves on something and engage in something that directly affects them." In other words, the strategy is to engage citizens in community issues that affect their lives directly and physically: "The opportunity for every citizen to participate in the events in the village or in creating the form of a gathering place. Activating people in the sense of starting to be interested in what is around me, because it is really immediately around me, it is not some national policy. **This is talking about a site that I will walk around every day**."

2.1.7 Dealing with issues in communities

2.1.7.1 Community action vs. community talk

We heard an emphasis on supporting actions in communities as opposed to discussion. Speaking of an upcoming event with the municipality, one respondent told us: "People will be able to state their interests, improve their infrastructure, empower themselves. But to tell you the truth I facilitate community events, not these events where there is a council member where people talk. **The thing here is the community actions**."

Another respondent noted that action (in this case building a park) has greater appeal than talk (i.e. the planning phase) for grantees: "…They just meet, invite, involve everyone if possible, plan, during that planning some drop out, those who come the first time maybe don't come a second time, **but then they come to the brigades again and I think it works well**."

At the same time, respondents pointed out that citizen engagement can range from more active forms (e.g. leading a project team, helping organize events) to more passive forms (e.g. reading newsletters, attending community meetings) and that different forms will suit different people in different conditions. In other words, one size does not fit all when it comes to engagement.

2.1.7.2 One person show vs. group

The importance of spreading responsibility for community life to multiple people arose in several situations. One respondent saw it as a practical concern, indicating that when all of the responsibility is concentrated in a single person, it can be too exhausting for sustained community work: "When it's an individual, we don't support it, we always want them to find some partners, not to do it by themselves. We make the assumption that the person will do it, but that he will get completely burned out in the process."

Another respondent emphasized the importance of shared responsibility by weaving it into her description of what makes a community sustainable: "In that it's not up to one person. In that the responsibility for the community is spread out among several main actors."

Another person went into some detail describing who may share responsibility for community action; in this case, the point is not only that the burden is shared but that the

players work together: "For example, that the project doesn't depend just on the mayor. That they know that there is some community leader, maybe a pastor who is active in the community, a school principal, a teacher, but that they know each other and that there are, for example, 10-15 people who all have a major leadership role in the community. And everyone knows about each other and they all work together."

2.1.7.3 Change of people, change of situation

The theme of changing circumstances, people and situations that may evolve during a project arose in several interviews. Some respondents made the point that communities are not static and pondered whether, when supporting communities, their organizations should assume that a project or initiative will have a limited lifespan. In other words, they surmised that perhaps we irrationally expect a community project to go on forever, when in reality the people who start a community initiative may later leave and the initiative may just fade away. This person said: "It's about that someone gets the community moving, but their kids don't want to live there. So passing it on or involving younger people in organizing activities can be a challenge in that sense. I don't know if it's going well anywhere."

Relatedly, another respondent spoke of how community events can also have limited lifespans due to limited organizational capacity: "...we used to organize a community festival **based on popular demand from interviews with locals**; trying to involve local businesses, the last year was 2018, not after that because it was too much work. Many years ago there was a festival organized by the local government, it stopped, it came up in interviews that people would like to have something like that."

Respondents also provided examples illustrating the power of a single individual to dramatically change the circumstances of a town. One person spoke of a woman who returned to her hometown after being abroad and began activating the community and fundamentally changed how people engaged in community life. Elsewhere, we heard how a change of director spelled doom to a civic engagement effort, when the new director refused to involve the broader community as planned.

In parallel, another respondent noted that our changing societal context was a force that we all need to address. He spelled out a number of issues that he felt would change his organization's work going forward: "...In addition to ecological issues, which I think will be necessary in our work, whether we like it or not, it's such a big topic that we can't avoid it, and technology, social networks, overall development, post-communism is over".

At the same time, some respondents appreciated that people are able to adapt to changing circumstances. From a respondent reflecting over community responses to the covid-19 pandemic, we heard: "Again, it turned out with the face masks that in this emergency, people were able to engage and connect quite quickly. That they are able to take the place of, for example, the state or, in fact, not only that they become mobilized in that you sew masks for yourself and your family here. But a lot of people here started thinking about developing lung ventilators - you know, that's just such a crazy thing. But it's great. Here, everyone who has a 3D printer, well not everyone but a lot of people, want to help selflessly…".

2.1.8 Investing in new vs. supporting established groups

The interviews indicated that the organizations emphasize planting seeds – i.e. helping newer groups – over nurturing well-established organizations. One respondent described the groups supported like this: "Yeah, [they are] mostly local, the kind of NGOs which don't have people who are actually employees, in small communities or one part of town or the whole big town with a small group of activists and volunteers."

We also had a chance to explore the logic behind this preference for supporting inexperienced groups. One respondent explained that she and her colleagues had reached the conclusion that impact was greater when inexperienced groups were supported, even if they submitted poorly formulated applications: "…because it can happen that people don't know how to write it [the application], they write it wrong and yet you feel that the project deserves it. And in fact, we have already seen several times that it was a good step [to support such projects]. That the projects weren't perfect, **but that it caused more things than when we supported some super, already up-and-running project that would have done it without us, because they were so good at it.** We would certainly like to support them too, but they were good at the beginning and were good at the end."

In a related thread, there was discussion of whether supported groups should be entirely volunteer based or whether community groups with paid staff should also be supported. One respondent reported that her organization prioritized volunteer based groups, yet allowed grantees to provide basic compensation to community project leaders from grants. This was based on feedback from grantees about how time-consuming projects were: "It came up a lot during the site visits, people talked a lot about the fact that **they didn't expect that it would take so much of their time** and that it was very difficult to handle in addition to their jobs and that it would be appropriate to compensate it in some

way. So we talked about whether to include personal compensation and there was basically a consensus that it was appropriate, up to a certain level."

2.2 Application process

In our interviews with staff from Via and Trag, we learned how application and support processes run in these organizations. This was not the case at Köfe, which does not operate set grant programs.

One example was that the support process begins when a potential applicant sends in an initial concept. A selection committee of community leaders short-lists 20 applicants who take part in a two-day training about how to engage the community and use existing assets in the community. During the training, the applicants are guided towards identifying resources in the community while the trainers also assess their proposals. The trainers consider the engagement the applicants are actually planning and/or send them back to their communities to discuss their ideas and then redevelop the project proposal within seven days. Then there is a final evaluation and selection by the grants committee.

Another example was that applicants fill out an initial questionnaire and then a program manager gives them a follow-up call to clarify. During the call, the program manager guides the applicant to think about existing local resources. The applicant then sends in a full proposal, which is evaluated by a selection committee. Each grantee is assigned a specific program manager as his/her main contact for the duration of the grant period.

According to some respondents, their organizations emphasize combining technical and financial assistance to help initiatives grow. Networking and training opportunities, mentoring by staff and external practitioners and matching grant schemes are often folded into support packages alongside grants.

We also spoke with respondents from organizations which engage directly in their communities. They provide support by e.g. holding events to bring residents together; conducting participatory action research; or providing a space where people can realize ideas: "Maybe our service is that we are here always. We support self-organizing, empowerment."

2.3 Flexibility/openness — choosing different ways

The previous parts of this chapter focused on the principles and processes of supporting communities described by the respondents. Here we introduce two aspects that may be consequences of the approaches described, yet at the same time may demonstrate a need to make choices. Further on we compare different community support programs and what they offer.

2.3.1 Same horizon, different paths

While an organization's programs **may all aim for a single end goal – strengthening social capital in communities, for example - the paths that specific programs offer grantees differ.** In one organization, there is a short-term intervention program for grantees wanting to take a lighter dip into community building and a larger intervention program with more intensive engagement guidance for those who want to take a deeper, longer-term dive. While both aim to increase social capital and local resource awareness, each accommodates a different level of grantee/community capacity and readiness.

One respondent viewed the shared horizon with different paths as follows: "It is clear that the [program] is different, but some essence there is the same: showing concern for and taking an interest in one's community, an active approach to what is happening around me, whether it is someone who needs help, or the whole neighborhood or community."

While organizations provide financial support to the grantees, the non-financial support has become equally important. We learned that the content of non-financial assistance provided by the organizations has gradually crystallized in response to perceived grantee needs and the broader social context. One respondent described adding a "**tailor-made educational component**, at first only financial and technical support in implementation then [we] developed other programs **(fundraising, advocacy in communities, teams)**."

Two people described more specifically how their organizations have begun sharing **resource mapping** methodologies with grantees to help them identify local assets. And in another program, in response to the lack of civic education in schools, a trainer is trying to fold it in to community engagement training for grant applicants: "I pushed for two hours of **what is civil society** in the training - basic definitions of what are citizens, rights and obligations is eye opening and then you can work with them."

2.3.2 Supporting the new, keeping the old

The interviews seemed to indicate a push and pull between piloting new program components and not tossing out what works. We heard this feedback about the change from old to new:

"Maybe one of the main pluses in this going to the community is that you can really fine tune your approach for the project and the community. In the training you need to – you can do it but sometimes there is not so much time...When you go to the community, when you sense they have a lot to say and they have written a really bad proposal, that none of the things they are doing is written there, you focus on explaining why it is important for them to explain this, and to add information about that, etc. So I like it because it gives you time to adapt and to fine tune your approach for specific organizations or groups of organizations on a formal or informal basis. In training it's also possible but if you do a 7-day training. And not 2 days."

We also heard about how important it is to balance the introduction of new trends with a realistic look at how applicable they might be in the local context. One respondent illustrated this point through the example of crowdfunding, which had been eagerly adopted by grantees as a sexy new fundraising instrument despite the fact that people were not accustomed to giving online nor were online payment options readily available in the given context.

We also heard from two respondents that staff in their organization had had mixed reactions to innovations that had been tried in the past with limited success, and had now resurfaced. One of them explained: "Not everyone on the team was completely in favor of it because it was something that had happened in the past and didn't work out completely."

2.3 3 Innovation

Wanting to continuously improve programming by trying out new approaches was a frequent theme described by respondents. We touch on it here and explore it more in-depth in chapter 6, Challenges. Some respondents described how they have been trying new approaches such as letting grantees design and lead a conveying and also letting grantees award grants. In another program, we learned the organization has changed its selection process; previously, advisors visited applicants and assessed them in their own

communities, now advisors lead a training on community engagement for short-listed applicants, where they are also assessed by the advisors.

We also learned how organizations have introduced new features such as making informal groups and initiatives eligible for grant support alongside the traditional NGO grantees, thus responding to changing demographics.

Other innovations mentioned by respondents are about reducing or eliminating financial reporting for microgrants, or asking applicants to first submit a rough concept and following with a conversation with the applicant to clarify: "Even with a more conceptual concept, which is exactly what I think is good, so for example the application form is ad hoc, but even has things that these people would not think about as well, so...it seems to me that it works quite well. Or the initial conversation with them."

One respondent related **how practical experience had led to a specific change in the approach** to site visits: "We try to explain that we are not a good option at an event because of the logistics, you don't need a donor at the event to ask you about the project because you are not focused. Last few years we only go before or after an event, meetings in their offices or in a cafe or the terrain. Sometimes we watched what they built in the project."

2.4 From interaction with grantees to structuring support

In this section we look at three ways in which interactions with grantees have led organizations to structure support in specific ways.

2.4.1 Diverse combinations of support tools

We learned that based on grantee feedback, the organizations have evolved diverse support tools which they **offer in different combinations to increase impact**: "We provide capacity building, advice and linkages, help them network, get peer to peer support, build their constituencies – to be more successful than they would be by themselves."

One respondent described a substantial difference between one program supporting short-term interventions and another supporting initiation of community foundations. The respondent described the distinction in this way: "They have the **same horizon but**

the starting points are very different, the preconditions are very different, the methodologies are very different, the approaches as well. So [one program] remains a national program. [The other program] is already a regional program. [The first program] was developed intuitively. It really focused on short-term interventions in communities. [The other program] is literally building infrastructure once we're all, you know, six feet under, whatever."

One of the tools that was mentioned is mentoring, viewed by some respondents as an important part of what organizations offer grantees; here its role in a fundraising program is described by a respondent: "After that it's more like mentoring and helping organizations look at resources strategically – actually create teams, or resources within organizations to do it, because it takes money or invest some time to strategically fundraise." Networking and moral support – giving grantees confidence "that they can handle it" – were also noted by respondents as significant aspects of support.

Grants are just one component of the support these organizations provide and as mentioned above, we encountered **an inclination to emphasize other types of assistance:** "The question is whether, if it changed a little, we could provide consultations when they might not need the grant, but perhaps they would benefit from either the online fundraising tool and support in fundraising or consultations, discussions about where they could raise additional funding. How to get it from the community, education, consultation, these are other possible forms of support."

Respondents also mentioned **appreciation of people and their efforts** as another form of community support, both public recognition and personal: "...[awards including] volunteer of the year, pro bono supporter of the year, donor of the year, which we give out at the thanks-giving event each January to thank them for their help in the previous year. I just took a thank you basket to an award winner to thank him personally."

2.4.2 Passing on experience from one program to another

One respondent discussed how sharing of experience in programs was a useful tool for grantees, who could learn from each other: "It's pretty similar, the reality. In some communities it really helped, the stories from other communities, where you can give good examples of how some other communities dealt with a problem or a challenge they were having."

Respondents also described efforts to share best practices at the program level. We learned that one organization is preparing to do this across the board: "So we will start in the next phase to build some kind of platform where all of this will be enabled.

And see how that works and try building it on to the other programs as well." On a strategic level, we were told here, this sharing is directed towards increasing program interconnectivity in the organization: "That was our strategic intention: to create synergies across teams, gather different potentials, broaden the thinking across different teams."

2.4.3 Call for systematic and strategic approach

One respondent expressed a desire to systematically glean findings from practice, where the systemization of knowledge is envisioned as benefitting a broader circle of people than just immediate grantees: "How do we create knowledge from that practice? So this is the next phase, the next step. We have a new website and we're trying to systematize our own knowledge. We will take a deeper dive into not having theories, but in how it all fits into the framework, how we can promote this on a wider scale for everyone else to do or something like that. I have to say we've been a little bit ad hoc with that."

Other respondents called for a more strategic approach at the organizational level. In this case, there seemed to be the feeling that innovation and/or learning had been happening without a clear plan and this left the staff in question unsure about what the shared knowledge base was and where and how they should go about acquiring knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

3. Organizational structure and culture

When talking about support that respondents and their organizations provide to grantees, it became inevitable to also reflect on how this support is structured within the organizations. It also became apparent that the organizations are not just empty shells; the people involved in them influence them both in terms of values and strategies, but also by finding their own places in the organizational structure. This chapter, unlike the previous ones, focuses on the internal functioning of the organizations and the issues that intertwine within them and create what the organizations are.

3.1 Roles and structure

During the interviews, respondents spoke extensively about issues connected to the life of the organizations they are involved in, their roles within these organizations as well as different roles the organizations take on vis-à-vis grantees. Despite the fact that a great deal of descriptive information was provided on the structure and functions of the three organizations, we believe that such information is available and provided by the organizations themselves on their websites or in other materials they share publicly. Therefore, in this report, we have focused instead on the more contextual information that might not be as readily available.

3.1.1 On an organizational level

We learned that in parallel to their roles as community support providers in their own countries, some organizations have gradually moved beyond their country borders and adopted a transnational role, acting as a leader, bridge or model for others in the CEE region. Some respondents viewed this as a natural development, others warned against abandoning the original role.

An upper management staff respondent told us that her organization's involvement in regional issues evolved organically until staff grasped the momentum and claimed the role: "Through our various programming we have somehow intuitively become more involved. Be it the fact that there is a regional coalition of foundations, be it the fact that we already at that time had a well established portfolio of supporting women's organizations in three countries of the region, be it the fact that we were participating in various regional projects transcending our national role, etc., so we kind of stepped forward and defined ourselves as the regional resource for civil society development and support of pro-active citizens and basically in a way it is a self-fulfilling prophecy."

However, other respondents associated with the same organization saw value in retaining a national focus because they felt the organization offered something unique in community support: "I don't think [the organization] should become regional or that it should work like covering Europe or whatever, I think it should be primarily a national foundation. Cooperating with Central Europe, but cooperating – I think it should be more than 60–79% a national foundation. And I think it should continue and develop even further that support of communities, either through social entrepreneurship or through its [community grant program] or whatever they want to do, but at the moment they are

almost the only one doing that."

He argued that the organization provided distinctive value at the country level based on its long-standing experience and expertise it had gleaned from that experience: "[It] has resources and knowledge, two decades of knowledge that should be used." He also highlighted that the organization had an unparalleled understanding of how communities work: "Their value is understanding and working with local communities; others don't have that capacity."

In another interview in a different organization, we learned from a staff member that this organization had been prompted to go beyond its national scope by a major donor, which suggested it share its expertise with NGOs in other CEE countries. We were told that although the organization's leadership had not sought this regional role itself, a gentle nudge was enough to convince it that **what it was experiencing in its own country could be of relevance to others**.

Another type of role duality appeared where organizations serve as bridges across sectors in addition to supporting specific communities. We heard from one respondent that her organization sees one of its roles as facilitating communication between different community development actors – including community development experts, academicians or local decision making bodies – on a regional or national level.

3.1.1.1 We are not a typical grant provider

Several respondents considered their organizations as atypical in that they provide extra care or features to grantees. In one case, it was an online sharing platform for grantees developed during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown, and in another case it was the emphasis on building relationships that defined the organization's approach to grantees.

3.1.1.2 Mother or octopus: external perceptions of organizations' roles

Organizations were often viewed as important hubs of resources and expertise for smaller organizations and as a cornerstone of community development in their countries. One vivid depiction of an organization's role **was as a mother "giving professional support to community development professionals in smaller towns, villages**".

This organization was viewed by another respondent as **"a constant, something very**

stable for me, and I know that I can count on them if, for example,…when I recommend them to an organization for something…Apart from being something stable, [it is] a huge hub of expertise and information…in the sense that they've got probably the most knowledge about community development." Finally, she likened it to a "sea creature with lots of arms – an **octopus kind of, but a good one – which reaches out to a small village**".

3.1.2 On a staff level

We heard on several occasions that respondents sometimes find themselves filling two roles at once, which may be in conflict because one role is about evaluating or supervising grantees and the other is about supporting them. One program manager explained that in addition to making sure program rules are followed, her job extends to helping grantees with administrative issues: "At the same time, I perceive that we are the administrator who records how projects proceed and we are, to some extent, **here to support grantee teams** that may find out along the way that they need to make changes to the project, so we are a partner in making sure those changes go according to the rules."

The theme of separating roles also arose in terms of distinguishing between **advisory and administrative roles vis-à-vis grantees**. In one program, external consultants provide guidance to community groups while program managers offer administrative support; in this organization, we learned that occasional blurring of the lines between the two roles in the past has led to a heightened emphasis on keeping the roles distinct. A program manager-respondent explained how staff try to set clear boundaries between these advisory and administrative roles. Speaking firstly of herself and the other program managers, she emphasized their role as guardians of rules and processes: "We guard the boundaries that are given by the foundation's strategies, donor requirements, the legal framework of the support relationship, the hired force, the supplier – recipient, the supplier – the foundation. The consultant has a relationship with the foundation, the architect is hired by the implementation team, and we are the ones who watch over everyone… [to ensure] that nothing is eliminated, that the entry requirements are maintained, that the rules are followed."

In another interview, we heard that external advisors in a different organization also face a **duality of roles, framed in this case as assessment and support**. Here, they advise community groups while also assessing them as applicants and training them. The respondent explained: "I assess, but I am also advising and helping them prepare applications. It's community consulting in a way."

Respondents from another organization told us that they are trying to provide guidance to grantees without tipping into actual mentorship or mixing guidance with their administrative role: "I wanted to flag that we are not having formalized mentorship right now. But for sure, organizations know they can come back to us or our advisors to seek consultations, where it is needed, if they get stuck or have some doubts, we do try to support them throughout the process but while trying to **separate our grantmaking role from the advisory role.**"

An issue that was very present in the interviews was the desire to be more connected to the field, to understand what issues people face in villages, in order to better shape support. One respondent painted a vivid picture of the situation as she explained how a recent evaluation uncovered the need to increase field presence: "What the evaluation has also identified – and this is something we have tried to rectify to the extent possible during the past year – is the fact that we as the foundation need to be more present on the ground. Somehow I think it comes as a natural phase in the development of a foundation such as ours, at some point you end up being an office rat, behind your desk, and managing expectations of the donors...simply, less and less time is made available, and but on the other hand, I think it's also a question of the organization and what your priorities are."

She then went on: "That [showed] that we need to be more present on the field and also that we need to listen more to the organizations, to their needs, to them." Her colleague also pointed out the need to have not just external consultants, but internal staff engage in the field: "...[Our consultants] bring some additional information from the field, visiting organizations, they were doing what we were not, they are doing the assessment of the organizations, talking to them, sitting in their offices, giving us some context of where they are, their work, **but now we see we have to maybe be the people who are going there and in the field more with the organizations**."

In another interview, a respondent stressed how close contact with communities has always been a crucial part of the given organization's approach and indeed, we learned that site visits and trips to assess applications have become a regular feature in more than one organization as they try to understand what people in local communities face as issues and how these communities function. One respondent explained the benefit of this approach, echoing the rationale behind the call for field presence described above: "The main thing is you have more time, ca. two hours for an assessment, you go into the community and talk to more people, volunteers, partners, **you can really see the community and see how this problem is affecting them**."

3.1.2.1 Witness to change

Some respondents described their roles as **witnessing changes in communities, i.e. following a community's journey and observing as change happens rather than creating the change themselves**. One viewed it almost as a privilege: "I have the opportunity to watch how the projects unfold."

One consultant-advisor to community groups appreciated her role as an outside witness, which allows her to advise without becoming entangled in local issues: "One huge advantage is that I knew the people just from the outside, because I'm not really part of the community."

Relatedly, other respondents described their roles as guides with limited influence over outcomes: "We want long-term impact on the community. It is a long process – we still have to find ways to work with them. **We are there to give advice, but we don't work in the communities, the organizations have their own way, we cannot influence more on that, that is not our way and we want to see strong organizations**."

Another described the value and the limits of the guide role as follows: "And so that [grantees] know that they can call us, we can give them our insight, but it is not that we resolve their problem of why one complainer always comes [to community meetings], but that we can give them a different perspective. Or pour more energy into their veins". Another respondent echoed this thought by saying "absolute wisdom does not emanate from us", meaning that her role was as a witness or guide, not as a problem-solving wizard.

Another respondent noted how the witness role should be separated from the administrator role: "And I try to set limits for myself, for the future as well. I will be very interested in what happens in those places [e.g. supported communities] and I definitely want to go there and participate in work parties and talk to people on the team, but at the same time I will try to be the person who is interested in what is happening, and only afterward become the administrator again and say, now I'm talking on behalf of the foundation and I have this opinion and let's deal with it on an official level at a different time and place."

3.1.2.2 Inequality of the funder-grantee roles

In the midst of trying to provide both advisory services and grantmaking, two respondents acknowledged that their roles as foundation staff introduces a measure of inequality into their relationships with grantees. One explained it in the context of describing the risks in

her role: "The second thing that is a risk in my role is that I come from a foundation that brings money, and that naturally brings inequality in the relationship, as well as a degree of insincerity in communication. Although everyone may try very hard, it just creates an unequal position, like when you go to the doctor's, the doctor is higher than you are and you are lower, you are a patient. You can be well-educated but it will still be there."

Other respondents described how they deal with this power differential by adopting a humble, lead-from-behind approach: "How we build relationships and how we look at the power differential between the donor and grantees is crucially important because –and that's probably me embedding a lit bit of my leftee mindset – generally it has been kind of proven in practice that if you lead with some kind of humility, towards your not prescribing, not directing everything, the impact is, and the outcomes, that come from it are definitely more genuine and more authentic...in terms of the context."

Relatedly, some consultants who advise community groups in small villages spoke about disparities in the language and worldviews of the support provider and grantees. One expressed the gap like this: "Even though I'm partially from their group, I think that the people who go to the project with me and are part of the community team do not fully understand half of the things I'm talking about". In a similar thread, another respondent based in a capital city mentioned the dilemma of trying to communicate with people in rural areas without sounding like an urban intellectual.

Yet, when it is possible to forge a connection between support provider and grantee, it can be a powerful and useful experience for both. One respondent described a site visit during which she and her colleagues advised grantees: "This was probably the most intense experience for me in terms of the foundation and visiting local communities. It was really nice to get a glimpse and see – we saw a lot of different projects – how it has a positive effect on people, what the real impact is. And I think it was very beneficial for us and for the people we visited. It was nice that someone came to see what they were doing, what they had created. It's showing an interest in it, it's not just about money, it's also an interest in learning more, and we've done various consultations where we've discussed what they could do next. We talked about the future."

3.1.3 Roles can change

We learned that the roles of individuals and groups in communities are not static and that support from Via, Trag or Köfe can motivate people or groups to step up to fill a new role.

One respondent spoke of how projects can open the door for people to take on new roles, even people who had not played a significant role in the community up to that point. Another respondent explained that after she suggested that her local municipality try community planning in a project where every citizen seemed to have a different opinion, she ended up leading the community planning herself, which brought her into a new role that continued to evolve as she was later hired as a community coordinator.

We also heard that sometimes a new leader emerges out of necessity, when the person originally intended to lead a project does not do so, as one respondent said when describing a new project leader: "It is rather interesting that he was not the main driver, that he became one only during the course of the project and then it was he who ended up finishing the project, as the other member didn't work out."

Respondents also described how support from an organization can change a community group's role. One person explained how, after a supported group successfully completes a project, it may become a role model for others. In these cases, we learned, a group may inspire other community associations to initiate a project in another town or motivate municipalities to give funding for projects similar to theirs.

We also heard that residents' perception of an organization's role, and their own roles vis-à-vis the organization, can change. A respondent explained that when her organization had begun working in the community, residents perceived the organization as a service provider (one of several) and put themselves in the role of consumers; over time, people came to understand that the organization was there to help them organize, not to provide services: "People as consumers, they go somewhere to get something, services, etc. There was a change, the Roma people…nowadays it is better, those people who come here to the café think they maybe don't want to get something, some service; they would like to organize something. They see more clearly our job and our role. They used to think we provided social services, now most people know who we are."

3.2 Fabric of the organization

Mostly through support of communities, this chapter looks inward, to how things are within the organizations. We spoke at length with respondents about how they perceive the culture of their organizations, and a number of themes arose that revolve around how the organizations share values internally, plan and implement changes, learn, make decisions and create institutional memory. We also heard about the role that relationships

play in the organizations and how personal and professional aspects influence each other.

3.2.1 Shared or disparate values

Through the interviews, we learned that the values that respondents see and most appreciate within their organizations include freedom, respect between staff members, a lack of authority or hierarchy and strong commitment by staff to both the organization and the causes it supports. A strong organizational value base seemed to be quite important to the respondents; one respondent mentioned that the solid value base she perceived in the organization was a major reason why she wanted to work there.

Respondents from all three organizations believe that values are widely shared by staff and in fact several viewed their fellow staff members as highly homogenous in terms of values. One respondent saw this homogeneity as an obstacle to the organization's ability to support communities because it creates a closed bubble from which it is difficult to understand what is really happening in communities. He suggested that increasing field presence could help combat this problem; in his words: "...Contact with people outside, those supported in rural areas, helps a lot, they do not have a Prague view, I think this needs to be constantly strengthened."

Interestingly, however, in one organization, views at both ends of the spectrum were expressed by different respondents, i.e. **where some saw value homogeneity, others saw pronounced differences in personal values**. We heard, for example, how personal values can create a challenging dynamic: "(Diversity) exists inside [the organization], it shows up in colorful ways during discussions, in terms of value we as people are capable of developing chasms between each other, there are big value differences, but the foundation manages to keep it together by moderating value discussions – it's the most difficult thing in the foundation and can hinder the organization of the foundation through the projection of personal values into the values of the foundation."

3.2.2 Steadfast strategy vs. response to context

The organizations' strategic plans were deemed important guiding frameworks by several respondents yet they noted many instances when things had evolved organically, outside of strategic plans or other frameworks.

One respondent described the strategic planning process as an opportunity to revisit fundamental questions of why and how the organization supports communities: "We'll discuss again why we do it, revise so that the way we do it suits us, and look for innovative things and look at where the foundation is, now I'm talking about the organization, and should be in 10, 30 and 50 years." She seemed to indicate that it was part of the bedrock of the organization, a solid and reliable foundation for planning change.

At the same time, we heard from different interviewees that not everything can be planned and there may be unanticipated feedback loops from the organization's work, which may be an invitation to make changes and/or develop something new.

For example, one respondent told us how the organization's work with community leaders had unexpectedly led to the evolution of a program about local politics: "...When [we] started doing community projects, **none of us had a plan** at all that one day the people we support would one day become mayors and mayors were always important to us and we talked about the importance of community leaders finding some way to cooperate with the town hall, but we never thought they were going to become that town hall; it's something **we noticed was starting to happen** and we realized we should start working with it actively, it's okay, organic development is great, but it wasn't part of any strategy, you wouldn't find it in any strategic plan 20 years ago, it wasn't there during the 1990s debates about whether the non-profit sector is politics without politics, so we avoided that political debate; even today the program in support of politics is modest, it is not a frontal plan about how to throw leaders at city Hall – that could turn it against the foundation as we'd be labeled 'Soros-ites'."

This recognition of not always following the plan plays out at the grantee level as well and seemed to be an important part of the organization's way of doing things. One program manager told us that she expects grantees to make changes and that it is the essence of community development rather than plan specifics that matter: "We monitor the basic framework and otherwise reassure grantees that they can make changes, we encourage people to **stick to the meaning behind the project rather than sticking to some nonsensical notion that everything should be as planned**."

3.2.3 Learning culture or absence thereof

We heard varied perceptions of how learning happens in the organizations, ranging from the idea of a continual learning process to the absence of an established learning culture.

One respondent saw constant learning as an integral part of her organization's culture, with an emphasis on drawing insight from the field: "**Because we never set something in stone; I mean, we purposely decided that because we keep learning from the field.** Keep updating our thinking." The respondent indicated that this was an important strength of how the organization operated and also told us that the learning culture extends to cross-program sharing, where the mindset from one program has spread throughout the organization and lessons learned in one program are being adapted to other programs.

In another organization, several respondents felt that a shared educational basis is missing and that learning and information spread through the organization in an ad hoc fashion: "One learns this only in the process, but it was not introduced to me at the beginning that the program...is based on this approach. I had no way to build on this. I think that training session I had with you and [another trainer], community planning, was really great, that is, community mapping, it helped me a lot. It was really great and it gave me the basics to better understand some of the processes…We are putting more things like that together. The ones you can build on, but it's rough." This respondent has participated in educational activities designed for grantees and done a lot of self-studying in order to understand the theoretical framework of her organization's work. Another respondent followed this reflection by expressing that there is a need for clearer support to newcomers in the organization and a more systematic approach to the theoretical and conceptual background people should have.

Despite the uncertainty expressed in the previous paragraph, in this same organization we heard from another respondent an openness to delving into the unknown: "As soon as we come across something that we don't know what to do about, we try to open the issue and address it." This seemed to indicate a readiness to learn and explore uncharted territory.

3.2.4 Personal closely tied to professional

A number of respondents emphasized the importance of linking the professional and personal, whether in terms of finding value compatibility, personally contributing to social change or overcoming personal doubts in professional life.

We learned that personal values often emerge in the organizational realm, whether through fervent discussions as described above or in terms of alignment between the personal and professional value levels. One respondent considered being in sync with

organizational values as essential to her work satisfaction: "We have ethical codes set up, with which I feel a need to be aligned with, because I probably could not work in a company that would not be completely in line with some of my beliefs."

Additionally, a sense of **personally contributing to change was considered important** by several respondents. One spoke of his work in the community and what it meant to him personally: "Community actions are good for them and good for me. I think I changed the place, [made it] better, prettier, it is important to me to make an influence." Another expressed her desire to personally make a difference in communities as follows: "As a leader of the organization, I am motivated to work and find a **way to build hope**."

How we experience our jobs and what they ask of us on a personal level was another aspect. One respondent shared an experience that, although expressed directly and simply, seems to carry elements of self-esteem, self-value and self-perception: "It was my first community meeting and I said to myself, Christ, I can't do this."

3.2.5 Relationships and atmosphere

Paralleling the emphasis on relationships in communities discussed in chapter 1, we heard an appreciation for good working relationships within one's organization. One respondent depicted her organization as a community in which relationships and cooperation are key: "What else strikes me is that one community is actually the foundation itself. I don't know if it's a hobby or what it is, **but that it's not just a job, that people are very on grounded in informal relationships**, that it's a pleasant, friendly environment and that we're able to stick together, everyone works together when we need to." Several of her colleagues had also indicated that time spent together, during site visits or other occasions, had been very fulfilling and perhaps instrumental to their bond to the organization.

Another respondent spoke of the importance of working in teams to make a fair assessment of community groups: "...[There is] always more than one person in monitoring, we talk a lot about it in the car, what is bad is in our minds, sometimes you know before you visit that some people are not good in reporting but good in the field."

In describing the quality of the working environment, several respondents appreciated that they had the freedom to be open and unhindered in interactions with other staff. As one said: "**You don't have to be cautious over anything; now you can address anyone the way you want to, which enables you to be free and authentic in your expression**,

minding some boundaries, while being as assertive as you can." Another respondent also indicated this was an important organizational feature by expressing a gratefulness for the freedom to speak one's mind and develop ideas.

3.2.6 Who makes decisions

There were two strands that arose in relation to who makes decisions: one was broad involvement of advisors and alumni grantees in decision making in order to connect the organization to field reality, and the second was ambiguity about who makes decisions within the organization.

In the first case, several respondents from different organizations said that consultants/advisors are often heavily involved when program changes are under consideration. According to program manager-respondents, the advisors' input is valued because they are in closer professional contact with the grassroots. Several advisor-respondents noted that they are regularly asked to review program concepts, join working groups charged with developing revisions, and/or recommend changes to criteria. One respondent explained how consultants had been recently invited to help review and revise a program: "I think it's important to say that the consultants were very involved. There were many reflections on the program, feedback, suggestions on what to change, and L. actually mentioned yesterday that they could suggest changes to the program. P. set up an expert working group, where there were former project managers...plus...consultants." In another setting, we learned that the organization has set up a committee composed of former grantees who now help select applicants; they are valued because they "have been beneficiaries so they know TRAG values and why this type of support is important for others; they are very motivated, have provided great input, and are a type of reality check for us."

On the other hand, another respondent expressed uncertainty about who is responsible for making program-level strategic decisions: "In my opinion, this is a big question – who can decide it? Can we do it in our team, or do we give ideas, and it has to be decided one level up?" This respondent listed a number of strategic questions about how to maximize impact, decide on target groups, prioritize financial or non-financial assistance, etc. that were unanswered in her mind. She said she lacked clarity about who sets strategic direction within the organization.

3.2.7 Intention vs. opportunity

Another point that arose was the extent to which organizations set their own programmatic intentions and/or how influenced they are by outside forces. One respondent viewed his organization's approach as a combination of both: "We were able to combine a sort of conservatism and when opportunities came up we didn't get scared, we didn't mind trying new things - we were open [to them]". This respondent explained, for example, how a social entrepreneurship program had been started on the prompting of a donor. And when asked to provide a quantitative estimate, he said: "60–70% was what we wanted to do, which organically developed what we had done before, 30–40% were external ideas, the core was always what we wanted to do – we never experienced mission drift, on the contrary, the fact that we have been doing some things for 22 years is incredible."

Another respondent also appreciated the role of opportunity and the need to grasp chances: "...Effects are sometimes unpredictable, one does not invent a way to spread it in advance, but then suddenly something opens up, we must not forget that we have to reach out for it."

One respondent also spoke of how opportunities grasped by individuals can make a lasting difference to community life, recalling a community leader who "discovered within himself some calling, or ambition that he may have had even if he did not start the project with the fact that he wanted to become mayor, but when the opportunity arose, he took the bull by the horns and now he's planning to do big things, they're going to restore a community hall, the change there is permanent."

3.2.8 Institutional memory or institutional amnesia

In several instances, respondents **expressed a need for systematic handling and/or sharing of knowledge that had been gradually acquired by their organizations over the years**. One respondent explained the dilemma and how her organization was dealing with it: "How do we create knowledge from that practice? So this is the next phase, the next step. We have a new website and we're trying to systematize our own knowledge. We will take a deeper dive into not having theories, but in how it all fits into the framework, how we can promote this on a wider scale for everyone else to do or something like that."

In another setting, some respondents felt that the community development concepts behind their organization's approach were not presented systematically internally and that

each staff member had to find their own sources of knowledge. Here, another program manager-respondent felt that concepts existed, but in a rather stagnant way without any further development: "It isn't being really created now, it's just there and just being taken over by new people. That's the ghost of [one of our founders] and it's still there."

3.2.9 Using theory or lived experience

When asked, a majority of respondents told us that practice has played a greater role than theory in shaping community support approaches. Specifically, we heard that learning by doing, observing colleagues and listening to grantees are all significant sources of knowledge.

In a few cases, there was an emphasis on **real lived experience as input to strategy development and innovation**. One respondent expressed the importance of field presence to learning how to support communities: "...and that's where we learned it – real lived contact, without it one becomes a theorist who doesn't know what's going on."

In one organization, some respondents noted the absence of a theoretical foundation to the organization's work; one said, for example: "It occurs to me that a lot of it was passed on to me without me knowing what the basics are. What the building blocks are, I learned only recently. Geez, that approach AD...?" Interestingly, while one of her colleagues concurred about the absence of a theoretical basis, she indicated that she didn't view it as an obstacle because the outcomes were proof enough: "The original starting point in [the organization]? I can't say, I don't need to find out, it makes sense to me and I see that it works." However, another respondent from the same organization **called for a stronger and lived theoretical basis to give staff "collective certainty"**, or in other words, an anchor.

In contrast, in another organization the respondents talked about **using theory extensively in their work**. This organization has been closely tied to a university throughout its history, with leaders of the organization teaching at university and students becoming staff members at the organization. In addition to this emphasis on theory, the respondents from this organization spoke of having a close connection between theory and practice, which draws on an extensive body of community development methodology. The leader viewed part of her mission as "bringing theory and practical daily work close together. We test ideas as soon as possible in the field". She went on to note that it "works the other way around as well; we make people working in the field each day realize there are other

people working in the same way and that there are other institutions and trends that are explaining things that cannot be explained horizontally."

In another setting, a respondent emphasized the need to adapt theories, saying she would prefer that her organization consider various theories from both the literature and practice and compile its own context-adapted approach from them: "...We will pile up the possibilities, the paths, the theoretical bases and create our own. We take something from each one."

Another respondent noted how she is incorporating a theory into her practice, i.e. weaving intention with reality: "...Nowadays we have begun working with the concept of community capital. It involves an ecological perspective in the process. I studied deep ecology in my philosophy studies, and I've returned to this topic again now in my work."

3.3 Goals, visions and reality

In this section, we begin by considering two nuances associated with the organizations' goals and visions – how they consider citizen engagement and how explicitly they state their goals externally – and then move on to look at how their organizational goals intersect with reality in the day to day work of supporting communities.

3.3.1 Engagement as an end or a means

During the interviews, we realized that citizen engagement was considered by some respondents as an end in itself, and by others as a means to achieve a further goal. In other words, while almost everyone spoke of striving to increase citizen engagement, some referred to it as a final destination and others said that the goal was to use engagement and other principles to build stronger communities. We wondered how this difference affected the selection of specific tools to support community development.

The first case – engagement as a stand-alone goal – was expressed by statements such as: "The primary change we are trying to make is that people engage; that the overall level of activism increases; that people look at resources as much as possible."

The second case – engagement as a means to a further goal – came into play, for example, when one respondent described engagement as a path to improving lives: "And

our vision is that those citizens should be empowered enough, and engaged enough, and resourceful enough, that they change their lives on a daily basis and throughout, improve the lives in their communities". Other people stated that they promote engagement in order to achieve other possible longer-term changes e.g. strengthening bonds between people in a community or bonds of the people to the place. The tools used to achieve these goals, however, seem to be quite similar to those used when engagement is an end in itself – namely, community planning meetings and opportunities to implement specific improvements together, for the good of the community.

Thus it would appear that while the perceptions of what engagement is or should be – a goal or a tool – differ, the activities and outcomes do not. This may explain why we also found that sometimes the same respondents would speak about engagement in different parts of the conversation from a different standpoint.

3.3.2 Explicitness

Another issue that arose was how explicitly organizations state their goals and visions to grantees and applicants as, in fact, grantees are the ones that implement these goals within communities. We heard a range of opinions on this point.

In one organization, we learned that physical change is promoted as one of the explicit goals, although social change is in fact more important to the organization. In this case, a respondent explained how physical space is used to lead people towards community building: "...It is the development of a public space. What is desirable to develop is the physical space for interaction in that community. Being there **will give them an excuse to do something there**." Here, the rationale for focusing on a physical change is based on the premise that it will allow for more interactions among community members. It was further explained by another respondent that the reason why is that people often come into a project imagining how they can change a tangible place or work on a specific activity and this is the goal that draws them in; only later, during the course of the project, do they realize the value of social change.

Another respondent explained that she and her colleagues shared goals with grantees, but "not explicitly, when we have a networking meeting we talk about why we do what we do and how we would like those communities to look."

In contrast, another respondent said that she and her colleagues communicate goals to

grantees more directly, with an emphasis on process rather than product and a distinct note of flexibility: "...We sometimes say that it doesn't matter what happens, whether it's a festival or it's benches, but that **the process around it is important**. And if that is preserved, it's fine with us."

3.3.3 Yeah, but...

Another facet of achieving goals or visions is, What is good enough? How close to the ideal do we need to get in order to feel we have achieved it? Various comments indicated that respondents differ in whether they strive for a full ideal, saying 'yeah, but things aren't quite right...' or whether they consider partial success sufficient.

On the one hand, we heard a lack of satisfaction with partial success: "Those situations where you have a Christmas-tree lighting in a village but the place where it happens isn't nice at all, and there are some issues, it's like it's fragmented and they're lacking a place where they could do it together – that's not enough for me, it seems like too little [to ask for]."

On the other hand, other comments expressed the idea that not every project leads to dramatic change, but **even partial results can be appreciated**: "...Even for our donors it is explainable, they understand what happened there, people do something, then it becomes a tradition, nobody wants to stop doing it, then these people grow up and go into municipal politics, then there are twenty of those villages and suddenly there are 20 good mayors in the Czech Republic. Sure, it's 20 out of 1,000 supported projects, but there is some way to explain it and there is already some evidence...".

Another expression of this theme revolved around **what community members can influence**. One respondent pondered whether it has to be the 'big' issues or if it is enough if they influence the 'non-essential' as one respondent put it: "It also occurred to me that these community activities concern everything that is extra, non-essential. The communities don't have a big say in things like roads, the appearance of the community, business. The community activities and that interest, except where we have Fast Grants [advocacy grants], it's different there, but often the community activities relate to things that are nice to have, but not musts, nothing happens if they aren't there for a year, you understand. In fact, I don't think they have any influence on essential things yet. Like new development, etc., the essential things are up to the municipalities, politicians and councillors, and the community life takes place around Peace light from Bethlehem,

campfire hotdog roasts, sports, I find this interesting."

3.3.4 They tell us what we want to hear

Gaps between an organization's ideals and a community's reality can also appear during the application process, it seems, and as we heard, underscore the need to increase field presence, as described in chapter 1. In one organization, program manager-respondents noted that sometimes applicants are aware of the wording considered ideal by the organization, and use it even though it doesn't correspond to their reality necessarily, in order to get a grant. One respondent stated clearly: "I think they know very well that we want to hear it." Her colleague went on, saying: "...in the application, as you said, it's more about what we want to hear from them. We will say that someone who really doesn't want to connect people will not apply for the program, so there is some agreement, but from the beginning **it's hard to tell and find out what their goals really are and what they know are ours** and that's why we visit them, to get closer to it."

3.3.5 Intention vs. reality

Sometimes respondents stated that the intentions behind programs and activities might not be fully implemented by grantees. Several respondents noted that their goals were ideals far removed from real world possibilities. One said: "There's a big gap between reality and what we would like to achieve." Respondents named a number of contextual obstacles to achieving their goals in communities, from intangibles like citizen apathy to specific events like elections.

We heard from one respondent that the ideal is that community projects can make meaningful change, but **sometimes they don't make a dent in reality when a place is really badly off to start with**: "And it's not very visible in some places. Just because you try doesn't mean it's successful and in some places there may be apathy and some places do not look very nice and it's partially because the effort didn't have many results, it is not so strong in some places. When I picture the extremes like excluded localities or border areas, the Sudetenland, in some places the effort to create a better place for living is not visible. But let's not judge by the extremes, by the marginal things we see."

Another person spoke of how **election tensions** can get in the way of community project goals: "We have encountered this, because last May before some elections, some people

said they wouldn't come, because it's definitely a pre-election event, so that made it a little complicated for us there."

Some respondents related visions that contrasted the current reality. Speaking of what the community would ideally look like in five years, a respondent said: "People are introduced to what is going on; it's colorful, it's greener, this is their self-representation, which is a very important thing to a group; communities can go out in public areas, can dance; **now they are closed at home and don't use public places**; they can sing, have concerts and there is life in the streets."

Finally, trying to use a new tool to include various groups can run into limitations on the ground. This issue was encountered by one respondent who wanted to implement an e-democracy tool for online training but ran into barriers in rural conditions: "Using [it] as a community development tool, [it is] not easy to start using an online platform in **rural areas without good internet accessibility**."

CHAPTER 4

4. Resources

4.1 Perception of resources

We heard different perceptions of resources in communities. Several respondents noted the importance of helping communities activate various kinds of resources: "Accessing resources: not just material or financial, but literally **building constituency, support, being more independent and relevant**." When talking about resources, people were often perceived as the main resource in communities, yet most respondents mentioned other resources, too.

The **power of people coming together** was also considered an important aspect of human resources by another respondent: "Then I see a photo from a community event where the people are having **fun together, celebrating**." Different groups were also specifically mentioned as assets, such as young people returning to their hometowns or foreign employees that appeared due to multinational companies operating in the area. Another respondent talked about local people being friendly to foreigners despite their lack of English language skills. Local patriotism and people being proud of where they come from were also mentioned as a resource. However, some respondents were not so certain about human resources in communities: "People, I'm not sure about **people** generally, individuals, **they don't believe in change** even if it's a small change in their close surroundings, i.e. a public space". And there was a view that people become a resource when they engage: "So if only 3 people are active out of 400, that's not really a resource."

Some also noted the difference between institutional and human resources: "I was trying to differentiate the two, because in my opinion the **institutions also include physical spaces and material, while stakeholders would be prominent people** or those who are one way or another influencing either positively or negatively the community life."

Another aspect was how involvement of people in the work behind an event or project can develop resources: "What I told them a lot is **people working together**. That it's not about getting it ready and inviting people to an event, but that they should involve them in the preparations itself, that it's much more than if they enjoy it that night and leave, and the preparation is up to just a few people." Here we see the development of human capital as a resource for the community, which can be utilized going forward.

This emphasis on developing resources was echoed in this comment and taken to a more strategic level: "Not just fundraising, resource mobilization: strategically, financial, also human resources, you have to invest in **building resources**, and others so that organizations really take it as part of their strategic development."

Another respondent commented on how a shared sense of overcoming a problem can turn into a resource: "It just occurred to me that what came to me from those conclusions is overcoming difficulties. That the experience of **overcoming difficulties**, such as vandalism or an element in the public space that was controversial and managed to be internalized, accepted, and they [residents] developed some kind of bond to it. **So I'd say it's important when it works out**. And not so good if it doesn't work out. I remember the reservoir that couldn't be removed, so I see it as not good when people go into a project with the idea that they want to transform a place and come across something that can't be solved within the budget, for example."

Additionally, nature was considered an increasingly important resource for communities by several respondents – in different ways. One noted that communities are increasingly valuing their own natural resources and that in turn communities which advertise their natural resources as an advantage are also increasingly valued by other people. Another respondent drew a link between nature and togetherness: "It's quite visible there that **nature is the true binding force for communities**. Hiking clubs, etc. These have a strong effect on community building."

4.2 Diverse resources already in place

Several respondents noted diversity of resources that already exist in different communities: "...[There are] different kinds of resources – every group or individual can provide different resources, there is diversity in resources and in needs – rural vs city, Roma, migrant population, local, etc."

Alongside this appreciation of local resources waiting to be activated, a number of respondents said that one of their main tasks is helping local communities see those resources while also expressing their needs: "[We] try to plan programs based on an **understanding of problems** in the community and **what are the resources that are not activated but are here."** Another respondent explained a similar approach: "Once they address us, we say is the need they have identified relevant for a larger group of people?, **then we talk about what they have and what they need**."

Another respondent believed that community projects help a community discover the resources it already has: "...They are often surprised by what resources they have there, what they can get in that community that they never expected before. That they actually perceive the accumulated energy of that community."

On an organizational level, we saw that some organizations are also successfully integrating some of these human resources into their selection committees with the aim of getting a broader view of issues on the ground: "...**different kinds of people** from the municipality are engaged in selection committees, they give a better picture of what the needs are. **People from diverse backgrounds, different professions, ages, etc**."

One person also highlighted culture as a resource, referring to a recent survey: "Culture – not easily recognized as an important element in the wider sense, but many people emphasized their need to have quality free time, that they would like to have more culture in their lives, more promotion of local cultural content."

Another noted that communities are often quick to take opportunities to enhance resources: "It seems to me that when a municipality finds out it can apply for a grant, **people accept what they are offered**, whatever they receive. It's an external resource, but in my opinion they quickly grasp the chance to do something, when someone contributes."

4.3 Multiplying resources

Another point that arose during the interviews was the multiplier effect, where bringing together different types of resources can create a groundswell of change. Respondents spoke of various ways in which resources can be combined in communities, also stressing that such combinations benefit the respective community and bring extra energy. In this sense, some respondents also mentioned that relying on the resources of one person or a small group can have a multiplying effect on others and can support motivation. The power of human connection can thus become a resource being created. One respondent said: "...It is **when people work together and connect and use the resources they have** because all of those initiatives, both initiatives, used the people, their knowledge and their expertise, they also raised additional funds from the private sector, they also influenced the people who are making decisions."

This multiplier effect holds true even in communities where it appears that resources are scarce, as noted by this respondent: "We said a lot. But I really think it is self- and collective actualization, where you basically give support to people, you encourage and motivate them, and then the change takes place, **change is possible** however scarce the resources are, **people are extremely resourceful, this keeps them going**." The view here was that it is the organization's role to give moral support to people in such communities, give them inspiration and help them see that a lot can be done even when it appears that

there is nothing to work with: "We are also working on lack of motivation of people by promoting good success stories, especially in small rural areas, some poor communities, or really marginalized groups that can also [do it]…".

Some respondents pointed out how the organizations help community groups recognize and make use of local assets that may not be apparent at first glance: "So they would be trained how to do community building as well, how to recognize assets, resources in the community, **networks of support, who their allies are** – kind of like community mapping". This practice involves looking beyond the financial aspects of resources to the value of connections: "Thinking about what you can do outside of the budget, how to connect more to institutions and individuals who are already there". We also heard that a mentoring approach can be applied with a long-term view: "After that it's more like mentoring and helping organizations look at resources strategically – actually create teams, or resources within organizations to do it because it takes money or invest some time to strategically fundraise."

Local media and business owners were mentioned as a resource in themselves that can also multiply existing ones. Respondents spoke about the advantages that emerge when local initiatives use these resources, yet other respondents mentioned that sometimes community groups do not use them. In this vein, a respondent said: "**Lot of small and medium entrepreneurs, micro companies** that want to help an event with products or people. But organizations don't have in mind to ask them."

4.4 What is enough?

Another question about resources that arose was how much or many resources is enough. In some cases, respondents answered the question by way of comparison, while some of the other respondents rather posed the question without knowing what the answer is or opening the door for different answers to emerge, depending on the specificities of each community.

As an example, one respondent said: "Some villages, municipalities **really have something that is quite valuable** and they manage to build on it. An example is the village X., they have a statue of the composer Brosmann and they have connected to it in a way that gives them some benefits…".

In another setting, we heard how communities' human resources fade due to out-migra-

tion, putting more pressure on the individuals who remain: "It also includes aging, brain drain especially among the younger, more talented ones. That **those who stay bear all the weight, which reduces the actual free capacity of the community** and human force, both from the perspective of time, intellect, mental well-being and skills". In this context we can consider how we perceive existing resources – as sufficient or lacking. In this regard one respondent considered a small number of team members insufficient for real impact: "Or informal groups also apply, and there must be at least three people. But if there are only three and there is no group of volunteers at least, **then the projects are not so strong, they don't have the potential**."

Another respondent noted that it is not only our outside perception, but also the perception of the community members themselves that is important: "I think that those are maybe the communities **where people think they are exhausted**."

There was also a perception that human resource potential was diminished when people lack external experience, because their capacity to truly understand community engagement is limited. One respondent described how community members intuitively appreciate the concepts of engagement, yet cannot fully take them in: "They like it, they go for it, because it seems okay to them internally, but they don't have the information, they haven't thought it through or internalized it, that's the difference because they never left [the rural village], they didn't have the chance, even though their hearts are pure, the difference in the intellectual level is huge." One may wonder whether community members actually need to understand the concepts intellectually, or whether experiencing them in practice is enough.

4.5 What prevents us from working with resources?

We also heard about what can keep a community from mobilizing its resources. This section offers some examples of possible issues preventing full usage of resources.

As one respondent mentioned: "It will allow you to implement, use some resource that has been dormant. For me, the topic is the resources that are hidden in those people. **In the Czech Republic in general, we have a lot of resources that we are afraid to use**. Due to a fear of being weird, of being different. I feel like there is a low level of general confidence here. This is a perception of the societal climate."

Along these lines one respondent tried to deal with a cultural inhibition to asking others for funding. He explained that for many people, asking was "outside the comfort zone, it is a bit difficult, **shame is attached to the notion of asking for services, funds or time, that you cannot pay directly in that moment**." In the same time another respondent spoke about inhibitions on the part of those giving: "**Giving is connected to funds, money**. **People are reluctant to give in that way**. One-fifth live below the poverty level, the average salary is one of the lowest in Europe. We mostly talk about giving expertise and time and connections, not money."

There is also the issue of which resources we choose to acknowledge; there may be historical or contextual reasons for excluding some, as noted here: "Yeah, church does play a role, especially in smaller communities, where it seems to be the center of life. **I purposefully neglected to write it, I don't see it as a resource** in the sense in which I am understanding resources...I'm not sure the churches are a resource, they certainly exist there but I think rather they are draining the resources instead of adding to them."

Taking resources for granted or misusing resources were mentioned as other obstacles. Taking resources for granted was meant as relying on financial support from outside of the community, where grantees buy things rather than searching for what their communities can provide internally. We also heard that taking resources for granted robs us of potential: "Water, ecosystem, wildlife, air; that people take for granted and which people should be aware of."

While recognizing how threatened resources can be an impulse for community organizing, some respondents were also concerned simply with the misuse of resources: "There is a huge struggle: mountain village rivers are put into pipes to make mini hydropower plants that are damaging the environment, just a complete plunder of natural resources". We also heard that there is a "struggle for water as a common resource" and "yes ground, bad waste management, **simply natural resources being polluted** and being used in various shapes and forms."

4.6 Can protecting resources empower people?

Some respondents indicated that if people join forces to save threatened resources it can be a starting point for community development. Examples ranged from working to stop misuse of water resources or uncontrolled real estate development to fighting against centralization of decisions influencing local communities.

Others expanded on this resource preservation trend in community organizing: [There is] **"energy around pushback to this trend**, towards government regulations and investors and mini hydro owners; land rights, people being kind of para militia. I think we are definitely contributing to pushback to centralization by supporting local communities and different struggles there, that is one thing to counteract the trend." And another respondent described how, in a more general sense, solidarity emerges when a problem arises, whether it be a threatened resource or other issue: "**When a problem knocks on your door, then you are everything and your problem must be solved** and the most important person and then there is solidarity and a connection."

One respondent saw certain potential already appearing to use such situations for community development: "More and more **people are more aware** of the problems around ecology, there is potential to organize around those questions."

CHAPTER 5

5. Success and satisfaction

The topic of success arose repeatedly, with different aspects mentioned. One was closure in the sense that shared success in a community project can be important to how people experience citizen engagement: “They appreciate it when the project can find closure emotionally, they experience the joy of finishing the work”.
The importance of success was underscored by what happens when it is absent and the group cannot bring closure to the project: “Where it has not been possible to realize a large part of the whole project and perhaps only a small part has been achieved and the rest remains in the planning phase, I feel like it doesn’t work that way there.”

5.1 Seeing success in communities

During the interviews, at times respondents spoke of changes that had already started to take place and were seen as successful.

5.1.1 Small steps matter

We heard an appreciation of small successes and their role in the bigger picture. Respondents expressed the idea that it is often incremental steps stemming from one supported project that add up to meaningful impact for the present and the future: "So these small initiatives can gather a lot of people and a lot of investment, in money, in voluntary work and they make a big change. It is a totally different situation now in that village and for me that was an interesting example of how these people who are motivated, who are connected, **how the small, small steps, can make something that is a great change**."

In another case, this incremental path to impact was not only appreciated but described as the very core of the organization's mission: "People connect on one issue and then there is a **domino effect.** This is the essence of what we do, the vision."

5.1.2 Impact as inspiration

Respondents recognized the power of a successful project to motivate other communities: "That's something that introduced some new models of partnership and working together and also made that **change that will last and inspire other communities**."

In some cases, we learned, community project leaders tell peers about their successes; elsewhere, it is program managers who use examples of successful supported projects: "Yeah, we promoted those examples usually when we go and organize our information session and we go to some cities in the region and promote our program, we usually show them such examples and successful initiatives so...for example, this village really inspired some other villages in Serbia to do similar activities."

5.1.3 Unexpected effects in projects

In several instances respondents noted that supported projects were leading to unintended effects that had not been part of the program's expected impacts and were not anticipated by anyone: "We did the evaluation and we realized that some things were

happening there that we, the organization wasn't aware of, if there is just one action they are doing and mobilizing the community around, **there are some effects on other members of the community or they influence some other organizations or groups, they are becoming the good models and then this model work is replicated by other groups and that kind of long-term effect that was happening there**."

In another case, after the organization had supported a park project in one district of a city that was a success, the city government began giving its other districts funding for public space improvements. The respondent who mentioned it recognized it as a wonderful yet wholly unexpected outcome.

Unintended outcomes can be recognized and valued despite their accidental nature: "Yes, but it is a completely unquantifiable or unverifiable outcome of these programs, which I think is not marginal at all...it has a high value for future generations."

In parallel, we heard about a long-term trend that had likewise not been anticipated: "...Community leaders becoming mayors was not [our] plan, it just happened; when [we] started doing community projects, none of us had a plan at all that the people we support would one day become mayors."

5.1.4 Connection (to place, to people, to oneself)

Respondents also emphasized the importance of collaboration and connectivity to making an impact: "...[These are] two examples which show how important it is when people work together and connect and use the resources they have because all of those initiatives, both initiatives, used the people, their knowledge and their expertise, they also raised additional funds from the private sector, they also influenced the people who are making decisions."

5.1.5 Providing experience and creating interest

Another type of outcome that respondents spoke of was **giving community members the experience** of voicing their opinions in an open discussion, finding common ground, and/or uncovering a shared issue that they can rally around and resolve.

We heard that a successful experience in community planning can lead the community members to work together more and have the confidence to pursue their own goals: "When they succeed in something, then everything moves much more quickly."

The experience is seen as a crucial step in motivating people to do good: "If children experience community planning and then something is implemented, then (my secret hope is that) it may affect how they make decisions and behave in the future. But I'm a little affected by education, so I tend to direct it all this way and see it this way. I just wanted to add that I think...that the foundation doesn't have such ambitions. The goal is, speaking of the...program for children, to **show children the experience and let them experience it, with the assumption that once they are either in another school or next year or adults, they will remember it and take it as some kind of experience they had and maybe it wasn't completely brilliant but it was kind of, and that they will want to do it again**."

5.1.6 Building traditions

Another potential outcome is development of new traditions in a community, which was expressed by one respondent like this: "If we support them, it should at least lead to the fact that they are able to stand on their own two feet as a result, or **they are able to establish a tradition or start a tradition that will then continue**. So, in fact, the longevity would hardly be a one-off event, we also supported several one-off events, such as St. Martin's Day markets last year, which was one event that took place, but we saw that longevity in that the group wants to make it into an annual tradition."

5.1.7 Diversity of impact

We also heard that a range of impacts within a single program is possible, and even expected. In one program, while the main anticipated outcome is bettering relationships in a community, each project can have a different impact focus area, or be impactful in a different way: "The strength of each project will be different, I mean. In some places it will be this, and in others it may be the quality of the design that will still be present after 50 years, and somewhere else it may be that some longstanding conflict was overcome thanks to the project. (I hope that doesn't actually happen, that we won't have to resolve any major conflicts.) But if it did happen and succeeded, I would actually take it as an equal success and **I don't expect all projects to be equally successful in everything**. And that spectrum is large. And I will also be happy when one of those communities finds participation so great that it incorporates it into some of its future plans regardless of how it interacts with citizens. Or I'll be happy to get an architect excited about this type of work and have him or her start doing it in his other [projects]...in his/her career. But there are more ways in which project outcomes can develop very well. The conditions are different every time, and we can clarify in those places and with the consultants, what the

challenge is in the given community, what the biggest obstacle is and what the biggest opportunity is that can be developed and then concentrate our forces there."

5.2 We're satisfied because they're satisfied

Respondents repeatedly indicated that one source of their own satisfaction is grantee satisfaction: "Grantees say we are the most understanding donor, which provides space for them to do what they want to do in the way they want to do it. **That we are a great initial catalyst in their development**...not only **have a number of organizations survived, beyond our immediate support but they have managed to grow.**"

One respondent shared her satisfaction with an innovative approach that stressed diversity and participation and which was well received: "I'm proud and happy about this one. It was a convening of women's organizations and networks that we work with from three countries, women from **really different life perspectives coming together.** It is special because the whole convening is designed **in a participatory way** – authentic space that we as a foundation opened and **let grantee partners design it**. It was really successful."

Another said that when a community has a positive experience with community planning, she feels satisfied: "...When they are able to engage people who are new to community planning in the discussion and the transformation of the public space, and we give the village the experience of being able to influence the design and that the discussion is truly open and that people are surprised. I have small goals, actually."

5.3 Satisfaction from practicing personal values

Respondents also derive satisfaction from practicing their personal values in their work and seeing that this leads to better outcomes. We heard, for example, how one person's point of view deepened impact: "...that's probably me embedding a lit bit of my leftee mindset – but generally it has been kind of proven in practice that if you lead with some kind of humility, towards your not prescribing, not directing everything, the impact is, and the outcomes that come from it are definitely more genuine and more authentic."

Numerous respondents highlighted the importance of finding personal meaningfulness in their work. One explained that for her, it was important to do work she considered meaningful and to have evidence that the work leads to something. Others described on

a more emotional level, for example, how they "**felt the joy of pure local activism**" during a community project or simply got a good feeling when a project worked out well.

5.4 When success comes as a surprise

A special sense of satisfaction was linked to success that was unanticipated. In one setting, there had been apprehension about how events with migrants would be received by the public yet later they were experienced as a success. As we heard from this respondent: "We invited them to participate in a Live Giving event and raise money for a basket weaving workshop for foreigners and Hungarians; it was **very successful although they were really scared, who would give to migrants**, but they raised the most money of the organizations there, and that meant a lot to them to feel this support...that we were standing by them and all these people were offering money."

Elsewhere, satisfaction was felt when fundraising efforts exceeded expectations: "Last year we raised money for the renovation of a village elementary school. We raised more than $5000 in 6 weeks – which was much better than we expected."

In another a case, a respondent said it was seemingly small but significant changes in how people in a community communicate that brought her a sense of satisfaction: "Then I like moments where people say, 'I thought I would never talk to this jerk, but now I see that we can have fun together'; things become possible, people change their minds about someone or something."

For another respondent fairly new to the job, it was the organization's individualized approach to grantees that brought surprise and satisfaction all in one. She said, in a tone of surprise: "I think it's great that it's really customized like that."

CHAPTER 6

6. Challenges

As respondents reflected a lot about what brings them satisfaction and about the meaning of their work, naturally the other side of the coin appeared as well. They also expressed that at times there might be different issues that conflict with each other, which lead to challenges; this is the case in most of the sections in this chapter. As explained in the introduction to the report, there are also two areas in this chapter where a duality does not appear: polarities and longevity. The challenge in polarities is that there might be differing streams of opinions or needs that oppose each other. We perceived that as being a challenge in itself. Longevity, on the other hand, is connected to impact, achieving change and making such change last. In this case, then, the challenge is rather connected to the question of whether it is possible to support communities from the outside and make sure desired changes are sustained.

6.1 Innovation vs. vulnerable groups

Some of the respondents reflected about balancing the need for innovation with not leaving more vulnerable groups behind in support schemes. One respondent described it in this way: "What we learned from the participatory approach in the women's program is that even in a more or less homogenous [group] – so we're talking about the women's movement, people who understand all the kinds of rights, and but still you can see that some topics will be neglected in lieu of others; more like innovative and forward thinking would be looked at as something...**so vulnerable groups or people with less chances will be on top.** So there are still some levels, how to level up. **How you provide chances for both, because we need some development, we need some innovation, but we also need to help bridge the gaps**. We need to help social justice issues in every way."

6.2 Geographic vs. interest communities

We learned that in the three organizations, community is primarily defined as place-based but there has been a gradual widening of the lens to encompass interest-group communities. One respondent told us: "I would argue that geography still remains the predominant factor but we have opened the door to other types of communities. Civic activism is taking on so many more different shapes than it was."

Another respondent said that his organization perceived community "as a town or village, the geographically defined place, or a collection of municipalities in a micro-region, but always geographic" but his definition included the people living in the place and their relationships and relationship to their history.

Another respondent explained the particulars of the debate and evolution of the thinking: "This is one of the questions, every strategic planning we go back to it. And we're kind of looking at, what is community for us? Is it the geographic location? Is it their interconnectivity? And I would say, let's say from the last evaluation we had, in the program, and looking and doing a bit of a redesign, what we did – we kind of now have a bit more of a theory around what it means to us – not just based on locality, geographies. Because it was embedded in that approach – where people live, work. But now we look more into the...I don't want to say identity...but at some point you have to acknowledge that some communities, for various reasons, and vulnerabilities and risk factors, cannot really communicate with the general population. And that they probably need to go beyond the borders of the geographic location to do something, to have new knowledge, in these

cases alone, we kind of look at the communities from the perspective of identity, but not from the perspective of identity pitted against each other. **So we kind of look at the social interactions at the heart of change, and then kind of like circles, like this is your core community but of course you have to look at others**...".

According to some respondents, this widening of the lens translated into changes in how community advisors are chosen, where, according to one person, traditionally "the selection was based on the places. So we would choose the advisors, who are kind of situated in a kind of geographical area but we moved away from that approach and now we have, when we look at the Board of Activists, we try to not only represent the locations, but they also represent certain vulnerabilities and identities."

6.3 Solidarity vs. accountability

This issue is about trusting grantees yet holding them accountable and the difficulty of finding a balance between the two. One respondent explained it like this: "It's hard to make this shift. A lot of people believe that just letting go and really trusting the communities, you know there's going to be abuse, there's going to be some kind of maltreatment or...and so on."

Another added: "But there's a fine line. I have to flag one thing, a fine line that we always struggle with. And that's generally I think a cultural thing here in the Balkans, maybe elsewhere as well. So solidarity is a really big value for all of us. But we kind of struggle with that part, where does solidarity end and where does responsibility and accountability begin? So it's kind of like, you cannot be doing that without being accountable...you really need to be...so sometimes we would be really empathic and listen, but you have to do a bit, do some kind of structuring, not just prescribing, but some kind of structuring of these processes, so it's not prone to...so you're well informed about who you work with, so you're protected against any kind of abusing that trust. And so on and so forth. So it's quite difficult and it's always adaptive, so it keeps changing."

Another respondent added: "Going to the roots, grassroots but the devil is in the details... it is difficult to have this type of mindshift while maintaining this type of operation; you cannot compartmentalize everything while going to the grassroots."

6.4 Innovation vs. consistency

There was an appreciation for consistency in provision of support, a contrasting call for innovation and change, and an awareness of the need to balance these two forces.

On one hand, consistency was a theme that we heard both in terms of one's own work and in views of support organizations. One respondent underscored continuity in her own work: "We want to keep doing what we already do" and when speaking of the organization: "It is a constant, something very stable, I can count on them if e.g. when I recommend them to an organization for something."

On the other hand, respondents voiced a need for innovation, as noted here: "We also need to shake things up a bit, try new approaches, new programs, working smarter and not necessarily harder." This respondent described a drive among staff to constantly improve their work: "We have these tough meetings, trying to push things forward, innovations" which, however, sometimes make it difficult to retain focus: "We like to introduce new things, somebody has to be conservative and say – stop, keep doing what we are doing so we don't start too many things and then risk not ending them."

Another respondent put it succinctly: "This is even our problem; we are continually trying to come up with something new; sometimes you have to say it's not broken, let's not fix it."

The question of presenting a consistent face to donors and grant applicants, not peppering them with too many changes, was also raised by one respondent: "I would pay more attention to this, take into account how the foundation is seen by grantees, donors may hear about it. Just a bit more consistency or stability, but maybe these are minor things. I don't want to seem like I'm against change, but I always think it's important to see if it does any harm. I feel that this can be important for people on the outside."

There was a parallel in communities, focusing on the use of traditions in community building versus starting something new and leaving old ways behind. One respondent noted traditions as a huge resource for communities, mentioning places or cultural events which were a part of the local history and identity and which in his view support re-connection to the roots and identity of the community. Other respondents perceived the "usual ways" in which people act in communities as a hindrance - specifically mentioning the passivity of people and strong expectations that "someone else should take care of the issues". Some respondents also mentioned trust in oneself and others linked their comments to historical developments as something that is influencing communities.

6.5 Compulsory vs. voluntary

As described in chapter 1, respondents from one organization ascribed to a non-prescriptive approach: "That is our mission. Not putting a label to how this community should look. They are creating the changes and defining the starting point and satisfactory endpoint".

However, when a non-prescriptive approach was applied by another organization, which piloted voluntary training seminars for grantees, the results were disappointing and led to a return to the previous mode of compulsory events. A respondent explained: "We have even tested for a year now having the seminars not be compulsory for grantees to not put pressure on them, which has not worked out completely, so now we are returning to compulsory networking meetings and now we are at educational activities, we will still be figuring that out for a while."

The dilemma here, we were told, is that grantees may not see the value of an activity beforehand, as described by another respondent: "Because people only find out that it is useful for them when they are really there. They do not see the need or usefulness in advance, they see only the time they have to invest in it, from which they do not see the benefit".

6.6 Resources vs. needs

In one setting, we saw a struggle to move from a needs perspective to a resources view. A respondent shared her exasperation with what she saw as an incongruence, where the organization promotes a resource-based approach but itself tends to fall into a needs-based approach: "If you take our ABCD approach, then this is something that really annoys me, because we have...I totally agree with the ABCD approach and I think it's great. But when you look at the foundation, when I joined or even what it's like now – a lot of people don't know what that means and they use the second approach, and now I don't know what it's called. We just all deal with the needs, nobody deals with the resources, and when I say that, when I wasn't in my position yet and I was dealing with these things with [an upper management staff member], he always got away with it and I told him, but I am worried about the program and we just don't do it that way, **historically it has operated on the basis of needs and not on the basis of resources. We don't use it ourselves. We are professing something here, but we are not using it ourselves."**

Elsewhere, respondents spoke of how the two perspectives are mixed: "We map the resources and then we ask what they need and we give them that. We roll both approaches into one". And that most mapping focused on local needs rather than local assets.

We heard in some cases how needs shape provision of advisory services: "We take good care of them if they need it. The care is present there, they have to ask for it, need it or want it". And: "In this phase, [we look at] needs first. We **approach needs on different levels**; we have research, meetings with organizations, roundtables, forums; for every open call, citizens are part of our grant selection committees".

One respondent referred several times to the fact that looking for resources as a starting starting point is challenging as the tendency is still to focus on problems or needs: "We have all encountered the basis where needs are the focus and we can't do anything about it. ABCD [Asset-based community development] doesn't have it easy".

6.7 Polarities

Polarities (i.e. opposing opinion forces) within a community, between various communities, and/or between communities and the national power structure were also viewed as challenges to community work by a number of interviewees. One respondent related how fractions within a single community hinder broad citizen engagement in community building: "We expect organizations to do all in a participatory way, involve different stakeholders in the community, but most organizations said this is becoming more and more difficult (to organize this kind of work) **because of divisions, different groups, political parties.** This is a big challenge we see these days. This is another reason for us to be more present, to talk about how to overcome this".

Other respondents noted the differences between various communities in a given country, speaking of the **chasm between rural and urban areas** in particular and the very different life experiences and worldviews of people in them. This, they said, **can hinder communication and understanding between community development professionals from the capital city and residents of remote villages**, for example. One respondent recalled the polarity she saw when urban community development professionals tried to introduce community building in a rural area: "Some of the ideas seemed to me a little far from the reality of the villages, because I would guess that between Prague and the South Bohemian village I know, for example, there is about a 20-year difference in the development of thinking, in the development of everything."

6.8 Longevity

In several interviews, notions of sustainability, resilience or longevity appeared. Respondents asked themselves questions about how to lead grantees towards sustainability and for how long, shared concrete examples of success stories as well as stories in which the long-term effect was lost after the organization stopped its support. From what respondents mentioned it seems that there are no right answers as to when and how to finish support to ensure it has long-term effects. One respondent mentioned that she does not even want to put a final line to the support her organization provides, at least not yet.

Overall, there was a pronounced emphasis on helping grantees achieve independence. One respondent put it like this: "When they achieve something independently, this is our final goal, that they will become independent. They bring their own ideas and it goes. e.g. the sign outside the café. When people bring their own ideas and self-organize". For others independence was not a final goal but a step in development: "With the aim of providing them with more **independence** . A building block. We work on it quite diligently. But not the aim in itself. To support **the freedom of what they really want to do**, their strategic direction". Some framed it as a challenge: "But how to work with former grantees so that the support is long-term, stable and so that it does not end with the one project they have in our foundation?"

When respondents described how they lead grantees towards independence, it was most often about **teaching them to find resources locally**: "We teach them the skills they need. Get the word out. Teaching them to find resources, including local financial resources." Another echoed this thought: "So we encourage them to fundraise from the people, definitely, so that is the main reason, to encourage sustainability".

Another respondent explained how this approach of encouraging sustainability through resource mobilization skill-building had been developed into a structured and successful exit process: "...actually, I have to say that we've just successfully did some exit processes which we're really proud of because no one got angry. So **we took the matching grant and resource mobilization approach in the core support and had kind of a challenge grant situation to kind of build the reserve** or something if they want to buy real estate, but they have to work for it, so they have to mobilize resources."

In one interview, we heard the view that nothing lasts forever and sometimes it makes sense to accept the limited lifespan of community initiatives. The question also arose as to how long support should continue; in other words, when has a grantee achieved an

adequate level of independence to no longer need support? One respondent surmised her organization would not support applicants who had become skilled enough to gain funding elsewhere, yet admitted that this evaluation was quite subjective: "We will probably reject them with the justification that they are already capable. Because in that moment we become only a source of financial support for them, but they are able to secure that support elsewhere. But it's really subjective, we don't set rules about who to support multiple times no actually we do: the project would have to, we continue to support projects if they are advancing in some way, doing other activities that will lead to community development, it is needed."

CHAPTER 7

7. Context

This chapter is the final piece in our reporting on the current and historical situation and brings a wider view of the environment in which communities and support organizations function. Many respondents reflected on external influences that affect both communities and organizations, sometimes also expressing that the influence goes both ways – towards the organizations and from the organizations to the outside world. To structure the topics, we start from the influence of history, then look at influences in and on communities and then go on to societal trends that respondents see across communities. We then change the focus to what respondents thought about external influences on communities, organizations and people and finally conclude the chapter with the organizations' effects beyond their usual scope of work.

7.1 How does historical context influence our shaping of identity?

In a number of cases, we heard about how the residues of the communist era are still shaping how people view themselves and their communities. One respondent noted the lack of personal responsibility for the public sphere: "The most visible effect of communism is that people still have high expectations from institutions that they will come and fix everything. When you ask people about problems in their community and how they see problems being resolved, most of them say the local self-government or someone should do something about it. **I think they are used to being babysat by the state.**" Another respondent put it this way: "Even 30 years after the revolution, there are people who do not realize that this is their shared house."

Yet at the same time there is a desire to break free from this mindset, as another respondent said: "People do not want to feel hopeless anymore. They want to change something, but they need tools to relearn how. We used to not be hopeless before."

We also heard that how people view communist-era community actions can shape their position on contemporary community building. In one country, a respondent explained that older citizens tend to have positive memories of building schools, etc. together in the 1960s and that these memories can be invoked and linked positively to contemporary community projects. He said: "When you communicate with parents or grandparents, it is the channel of communication; it is how you can explain why it is important; for the majority of people on a value basis, it was a clear idea, they have good emotions about it, and it was a good way for intercultural learning."

However, in another country, respondents related how staff had feared that these communist-era projects would cast a negative connotation on current projects: "We were afraid that people would tell us that we were doing Z Events [from the communist era]. In the first decade after the revolution we all had it up to here with socialism and the idea of telling people, 'Hey, let's do something together' sounded like a Z Event. Many of us were a bit skeptical at the time – wondering whether it wouldn't turn out to be a big mess". In this case, the fear expressed by the respondent turned out to be unfounded; the community did not boycott the project due to negative connections to historical Z events.

In a stark departure from these opinions that history continues to affect community building, one respondent stated that the influence of communism on people's attitudes, whether positive or negative, was a thing of the past. In his view, today CEE countries are

confronting the same issues as their western counterparts: "Post-communism is over – now it does not matter whether it is the Czech Republic or Austria or Hungary."

7.2 Stakeholders

When illustrating the range of typical stakeholders in communities, respondents described groups that are absent from many community initiatives – namely middle-aged residents and senior citizens. It was also mentioned that at times communities split into stakeholder factions with different interests or historical positions in the community and that there might be stakeholders who represent both a potential benefit and a risk. At the same time, some respondents pointed out that there may be stakeholders with differing views but with a shared concern for the community.

One respondent noted that the middle-aged or "sandwich" generation is sometimes missing from the picture due to financial pressure and obligations to their families: "And then maybe those young families with children will come, but the middle generation who didn't go through it will be missing somewhat. But we'll see, I'm jumping ahead; the middle generation is the one who has the least time, because they just work, work, work and that's me too, damn it."

On the other hand, we were told that one group that can play a key role in the stakeholder mosaic is people who return to their hometowns. We heard that they can be a source of new energy for community activities, yet can also create divisions between existing groups: "There are a lot of community leaders in our programs who are the returnees who lived in other places and have now returned to the community. **They are both the hope for the town that something will start to happen and so on, and also if they grasp it wrong, they can tear the community apart**."

Another respondent saw even deeper rifts in the communities she had worked in: "...Often the community either does not exist or there are two and a half communities. I say two, which in some way often fight or disagree, e.g. firefighters and hunters may be jealous of each other or maybe disagree, and then the half are those who are not in any group at all".

On the other hand, respondents noted that while each stakeholder may have a different viewpoint, they may be united in their concern for the community's well-being: "**What connects a lot of the communities we visited is in a way that first of all, they are quite focused on community well-being**, worried about how that will play out". She added:

"Concern for their children's future – that is what prompted many parents to engage in the community, an extreme desire to do something for their kids so their kids could have a good life in their community, even if the kids were going to leave at 18, they want the 18 years to be good."

And in a similar vein, one respondent noted that different viewpoints can co-exist and each contribute to the whole: "It occurs to me that **people care about the development of this place, everyone from their own perspective**. When the mayor speaks, he feels responsible for the development of the community, the infrastructure and services for the citizens. When someone who works with young people is talking, they are looking for a place where they can work with children, when the conservationist is talking, they are thinking about where to put an info board about birds. Everyone has their own themes, but it's okay."

7.3 Apathy vs. action

We heard a good deal about apathetic residents presenting a challenge to community building on the one hand and about individuals taking the initiative to make change on the other hand, indicating a co-existence of contrary forces.

One respondent noted that: "**Apathy** is also one of the challenges that we're having, a lot of people accept the ways things are and don't try to do much about it". Another lamented that "What is unfortunate is that in the last 10 years we have seen a **slowing down of activism**, especially by young people in local communities because I think that they see it as a much longer way to influence local processes." This lack of interest was also tied to feeling disempowered, as another interviewee said: "Individuals, **they don't believe in change** even if it's a small change in close surroundings like public space."

But we also heard about people carrying on valiantly with community work in the face of pervasive apathy. One respondent said: "...It's a typically Czech small town, which is not easy to get moving at all, a typical Czech small town means the Sudetenland, where there is enormous civic passivity, at the same time there is the great potential of the castle, which is dilapidated, right on the square. A bunch of people came together when I first arrived there, 3-4 years ago, it was very disheartening, there were three people, it was raining, almost no one came, terribly depressing. They didn't get discouraged and they're still at it…".

This brings to light a thought – when we support communities or when we view community building, do we focus on the negative or the positive? Or first the negative and then swing to the positive when we feel we've overdone it? One respondent, for example, described envy as a characteristic of communities, then later reconsidered: "So probably throw out the envy, that's so ugly. And it's like that in some places, but I don't want it to overshadow the other nice features."

7.4 Municipalities: a resource or a problem

Local government was viewed as a source of support by some respondents and as an obstacle by others. There was actually similar reasoning for both facets, for municipalities were seen as an important actor in the community in both points of view. Some respondents perceived municipalities fulfilling their role and fostering community building, while other respondents had experienced municipalities blocking or hindering such development. We heard about a municipality that nurtures the wide range of associations and groups in its midst: "The village works nicely with it, trying to make the portfolio [of community events] quite wide and it corresponds to a wide range of activities, they are open to everything".

In another setting, local government was considered a major obstacle to open civic engagement because the system was heavily politicized and loyalty to the ruling national party determined who had a say in local matters [described in National/political polarization below]. Yet despite, or precisely because of, this blocking of local action by national politics, some respondents spoke of how people are now engaging on the micro level - in their immediate neighborhoods – where there is face-to-face contact and where they still can make a difference. In one setting, for example, we heard that "people called for agora type meetings when they could see each other in the eyes. People are willing to dedicate for something very concrete." This aligns with one of the organization's theory of change that changing many small communities can add up to societal-wide impact.

Reflecting the importance of the municipal role, and how widely it can differ, another respondent noted how the municipality's mindset determines the extent to which citizens can influence what goes on: "You can influence them through elections, and then it depends on the openness and transparency of the town hall how much you can influence it in between elections."

7.5 Influences coming from outside communities

Respondents spoke of different societal developments happening across their countries that also affect the lives of local communities. The respondents perceived such influences as important because they increase tension in communities, yet the trends need to be resolved on a regional or national level. Respondents mentioned different influences and often reflected on residents' participation in community life. For instance, one respondent mentioned "**Brain drain** and even more so now with the pandemic, not knowing what the effects will be on people, social, economic, health."

We also saw the influence of the national context when a respondent described community members with migrant backgrounds as well as event organizers being afraid of sharing migrants' stories because of the national antagonism against diversity. They later found that the event did not evoke negative responses from the community as expected: "We were also afraid. It's a psychosis you get here. We went through scenarios – what if Neo-nazis come and ruin the pictures, should we do it or not? How should we advertise it? And nothing of that sort happened, luckily. There was quite a bit of publicity". The respondent then further explained that it was a great experience and lesson for their initiative as well as for the people from different backgrounds not to give in to fear and not to let oneself be influenced so strongly by powerful negative public rhetoric.

We also heard about how grant applications are influenced by specific individuals bringing outside experience into the community: "The first step of designing their approach to influence some need is really **influenced by the people who are there** and their life experiences e.g. if they are someone who worked in a NGO, they will use that approach, write a proposal for a grant". We also heard that in other cases an outside grant writer influences the application so heavily that the local residents' presence is lost: "I do see the patterns of individuals, but not the stamp of the community. The small local organizations are just starting to write their applications, sometimes they think they are doing the right thing, they find outside help. **This outside help** doesn't show the originality of the project but **suffocates the project**."

7.6 National/political polarization influencing the local level

Some respondents described a very basic political division on the national level that was

making it difficult to bring people together at the community level: "Well, there is quite obvious political polarization and there are actual narratives coming from the top that contribute to it, it's **like your central government is pitting people against each other, marking someone as the other and that contributes to political polarization and how people become prone to looking at other people as the other**…".

Another respondent followed by explaining how political polarization was replacing open participatory processes with party loyalty: "...People are put against each other about things that might not even affect their daily lives, like migrants; how many communities have actually seen a living migrant? This type of agenda is being pushed in order to cover up for other much more important things, the political economic and social disenfranchisement of the overall…**you don't have institutional flows of decision-making and consequently citizen participation in a structured institutional way, it is left to the few in power who are loyal to the party and not to their communities**. The political system fuels this and propels this". In this way, government becomes a major obstacle to open civic engagement because the overall system is heavily politicized and only those who are loyal to the ruling national party have a say in local matters.

Other respondents in the same country expanded on how local civil society has become infiltrated by political aims. One respondent explained this point by telling us what he looks for when assessing a community group: "When I go in a community, when I check some initiative, the first thing that I check is, are they connected to a political party? And in more than 50%, they are connected with some political parties. So most of the initiatives are interest/politically-oriented in smaller communities. **Our politicians, our political parties understood and started to use civic initiatives as a very nice tool**. That's very important."

Another compared the current politicized atmosphere to the situation some ten years ago: "When I started to work as an activist, when I became active, there were a lot of organizations coming up, people felt empowered to change something on their local level; and **now there is a lot of political and other influences on the local level**, like political parties opening dozens of NGOs before the deadline of local government to get funding. It's something that really happens."

These two respondents also talked about how government agencies' abuse of community development had disintegrated people's trust in community building and in the entire non-profit sector. He explained that **because these agencies abused their power, many people now doubt the sincerity of any activists who promote a community building**

process: "Another side is the not very fine-tuned approach of different development agencies all over Serbia. I can say one example, my previous organization, the director was a smart guy who got a job invite from USAID and when they came to my hometown the first thing they bought was 12 SUVs and granted the fanciest building in town to do the development aid. And I remember when I was talking about volunteer work with young people, this completely changed because he was the face of the organization and now they see him in a SUV that's like $30,000 in a town where the average monthly salary at that moment was 200 euros. And people started to come to our events because they want to get that kind of career, that kind of job. And not because they want to change something in their community. So really in some parts of Serbia **it influenced negatively the whole point of activism and community building**. It went to that level that in some communities, and I will not say which organization, everyone knows which organization, they were paying fees for people to participate in local workshops."

Another respondent related his own experience, which is also a story of eroding trust in outside community development professionals: "You know I never worked with USAID. They give grants in local communities in central Serbia ...and PR is more than 50% of the total grant. And people are pissed off. That's happening with internationals. We don't trust them anything. The sky is blue ...pfff!"

And along these lines another respondent mentioned that there was also a wariness of working with government agencies: "Dignity is something we would not compromise on. Working with government agencies is controversial". Another respondent explained it by expressing that there is a great amount of corruption or favoritism in politics that is translated into governmental structures on different levels.

7.7 Changes in society can lead to changes in organizational strategy

Some respondents noted that society had changed and will continue to change in unpredictable ways, and that such changes are affecting their organization's work and strategy. One person saw environmental stresses as well as the shift in mood in society as influencing factors, while recognizing that new as yet undefined changes would continue to emerge: "[Now] it's completely different, and I have a feeling that the whole thing has moved in a more optimistic direction, and then in addition to environmental concerns which I think will be a necessary part of our work, whether we like it or not, it's a big topic, I still can't avoid the feeling that there are a lot of other influences that we can't react to yet."

Another respondent explained how her organization had changed its stance to political engagement due to the deteriorating space for civil discourse in CEE society: "For years we tried to be anti-political, neutral. But two to three years ago we realized the situation is worse, we have to stand and **become more political**."

Another person spoke of how new opportunities in the civil sector necessitated a change of organizational strategy: "There are a lot of new groups, new kinds, people now have a chance to get some kind of education and training that did not exist 10–15 years ago. We need to be more pro-active, we realized...that is also a changing of our strategy."

7.8 Partnerships

Several respondents mentioned that their organizations are increasingly becoming involved in different partnerships and mentioned that by standing together they can be stronger. Respondents provided various examples of partnerships they have formed (or tried to form) on different levels, from the community to the multinational region, and how those **partnerships have influenced their work in fundamental ways**.

Some respondents mentioned situations where a major donor had substantially set the organization in a new direction. In one case, the organization became the key regional implementation partner for the community foundation support initiative of a major donor. This led the organization into a new role and a new self-perception, as one respondent explained: "[We] restructured our activities so that they respond to this shrinking environment and taking on a broader regional position than we used to have, we perceive ourselves as a regional foundation."

In another example, a donor had instituted an experimental approach, a freedom to pilot new things and make mistakes which led to essential innovations on the program level, such as convenings co-organized by grantees. In this case, the respondents perceived the partner's influence as positive because it brought new opportunities and advanced the organization's approach, while others saw it as a burden that brings too much bureaucracy and the views of donors can be far away from the reality of the communities.

Not all attempts to partner for a social change succeed. In one town, respondents related how their NGO had embarked on a partnership with a local institution, a school, with the shared aim of involving poor children in sports activities. However, we were told that the effort floundered when the school got a new director: "The Jesuit school shapes

the views of the people in sports but it was not so successful; they wanted to invite the community to use their new sports center, but later when there was a change of director, the new one did not want to." According to the respondents, the school continues to ignore the NGO's attempts at communication.

Some respondents also mentioned their experience from other fields or from involvement with other types of activities or target groups and compared them to their work in the organization. A respondent spoke of how other fields had influenced him personally: "The main plus in going to the community is that you can fine tune your approach to the community; in the training you can do it but sometimes there is not so much time. I am spoiled by youth training – it's individualized – that's something I'm missing."

CHAPTER 8

8. Changing the paradigm

This chapter, unlike the others, brings together the intentions and visions respondents saw in the life of the organizations they work with. Some of the topics described below are strategies that are being put in practice, even though they may be only partially implemented so far. Some of the themes are more on the level of visions, something the respondents along with their organizations see as relevant and important to focus on in the future and which might not be incorporated into the functioning of the organizations yet. At the beginning of the chapter we introduce how these approaches have developed. Further on, we focus on possible directions for the future.

8.1 Internal

8.1.1 Content development of approaches in the organizations

In this section we explore **how** the organizations have developed their approaches over time.

8.1.1.1 From being place-based to looking more at social interactions

We heard various views on who is the focus of support provided by the organizations. The dilemma whether local communities should be the sole focus or whether interest groups or groups with specific needs should also be a priority was raised. Some respondents saw the two directions as complementary now as well as for the future, while others expressed the view that if they work with interest groups then it should still be for the benefit of communities.

Several respondents also said there had been a gradual shift from a primarily place-based mindset to looking at interactions as the heart of change: "But now we look more into the...I don't want to say identity...but at some point you have to acknowledge that some communities, for various reasons, and vulnerabilities and risk factors, cannot really communicate with the general population. And that they probably need to go beyond the borders of the geographic location to do something, to have new knowledge, and in these cases alone, we kind of look at the communities from the perspective of identity, but not from the perspective of identity pitted against each other". Another respondent described the organization's focus on interactions as follows: "But why I chose this is the word partnership, it is about the people coming together and creating the space for dialogue and creating, coming forward with something which is the fruit of the consensus building. This is us, with our partners, but this is the way how we do it, in general, also to support the communities. It's how to build this critical mass of partnership and mutual support."

8.1.1.2 From local fundraising to resource mobilization

Helping local communities become aware of their assets was mentioned by several respondents as an approach that, it seems, is becoming more and more strongly embedded in their practice now and as they look towards the future. Respondents described how their approach had shifted from local fundraising to resource mobilization: "Yes and not

just fundraising, but what resource mobilization can mean to your strategy. We also tried to really work towards that becoming. So we would start from very ad hoc basics, with grassroots organizations but with some other organizations we start working more strategically, so we talk to them, do they have human resources to fit this, they need to know that you need to invest – you need to give some money to get some money – so you need to invest into building resources, so human resources, and funds or whatever depending on what you want to do. So we work with organizations so they really take it as part of their strategic development…As we build our own strategy around it. And an important part of civil society, actually."

The respondent went on to describe what that looks like now: "We have actual programs that are dedicated to resource mobilization, organized around a matching grant scheme, so we give them education, training, give them a challenge to go back to their communities and mobilize resources for the cause they came up with in the beginning, the cause is in the heart of it; [our] team provides training, mentoring, connections if possible, some ideas of where to go and where to start, and provides small means to organize fundraising and them gives them a matching grant."

8.1.1.3 Adding different levels of support for different target groups

We heard that the organizations have gradually diversified and expanded their support portfolios: "Over time, we realized we could add different levels of support for different target groups, that was the development process over the years." This change seemed to come from several starting points. The first one was based on feedback from grantees about what changes were and were not possible within the established support frameworks. Another one came from observing how society and communities evolve over time, and in this sense respondents reflected that support both in terms of different tools as well as different target groups had become a necessity. Respondents mentioned adding educational aspects to their work that would become a fixed part of their programs for the future. Mentoring and other more individually-tailored approaches were mentioned as becoming embedded in their support frameworks. Others mentioned a need for dialogue and interaction between program managers or consultants and grantees even before support is provided to find more suitable ways of supporting grantees from the start.

One respondent described the notion of helping grantees develop in a variety of ways: "And we have tried also to have, if possible, this type of **developmental pathway**, it's not always clear, I have to say, it is still unfortunately very much dependent on available

funding, but we have tried to make a concerted effort to engage, to contribute to their organizational development, development of their capacity, their stronger involvement in the community, not only through local resource mobilization but also other various forms of engagement."

8.1.2 Developing and institutionalizing the approach

8.1.2.1 Broadening an organization's sphere of action

Respondents provided various examples of how they have broadened the spectrum of programs or activities for grantees to better answer their needs. In some cases, a new program for a specific target group was designed, while in other cases new types of activities were added to existing programs. It seemed that the respondents saw benefits from these trends and it also appeared across different interviews that the organizations tend to adapt and change their programs and activities repeatedly. Some respondents also mentioned further broadening of the scope of operation and we learned that one organization had recently expanded its role to supporting community foundations, not only in its own country but on a regional scale. We heard how this new role as a facilitator of new community development initiatives emerged from the growing importance of informal groups in local communities.

8.1.2.2 Learning to celebrate our achievements

When speaking about changes that should be sustained into the future, a number of respondents reflected not only on the content and management of support, but also considered the staff of the organizations. One respondent noted an important change in organizational culture, where the team had learned to celebrate their achievements: "We noticed we sucked at celebrating so we decided to change it. At least conscious efforts. I want people to be more aware of how great they are and how much effort they put into something. We'd organize an event, it went great, and someone would just acknowledge that at the next staff meeting and we'd be working on the next thing. Now we're trying to make a conscious effort like going out for drinks or getting a cake after an event. We dedicate an entire day after an event to evaluating and celebrating and giving people the recognition they need; we really lacked this before and it led to people feeling completely burned out and not able to see how much they'd accomplished; going through motions without reflecting."

8.1.2.3 Simplifying our work

We heard about several efforts to reduce bureaucracy and simplify administration for both grantees and program staff. Respondents described how they have been streamlining application processes, where grantees send in concept papers or fill in preliminary questionnaires before sending in full proposals. Simplification also extends to communication channels: "Specifically we've just made a **participant portal for the successful ones**. Before, it was a pretty ugly page full of information. We made a visual format of the information and we are gradually simplifying our work, both for grantees and for ourselves."

8.1.2.4 Towards an evidence base

One respondent described a largely intuitive approach that dominated the organization's early days: "I'm not sure we adopted some approaches, we did it for many years, thinking how to respond to the needs; we were not aware that we were using some methodologies."

Since then the organization has gradually gravitated to a more evidence-based approach. It carried out a major program evaluation to assess whether, after 19 years, one key program was still achieving the change it aimed for: "The evaluation was internally driven. We said we need to do it, update where we stand, are we making a difference, what do we change to improve. It was a self-driven process. More revealing in qualitative terms. And more informative for us." At the time of the interview, the organization was in the process of piloting changes based on the findings.

In another organization, a working group of program managers and consultant community advisors had been set up to review a longstanding program and draw up recommendations for changes to the program. In another program, grantees were interviewed as a quick evaluation; the findings served as the basis for a subsequent evaluation and a planning meeting; elsewhere, a series of interviews and a report served for team reflection over strategy.

Another respondent also saw grantee input as a key element in strategy development: "We would get the input from the ground usually, because in our logic we always try to work bottom-up, **so we try to really listen and to be immersed in what's happening in the communities and let that inform our strategies and how we work**. So usually that comes from the bottom-up. So anywhere from groundwork that program officers get, you

know, we are kind of a foundation that's different...we have this kind of trust that we built anywhere from short-term projects to long-term...[recording fades out]. More qualitative, human, is how we look at it...assessment of needs, that is a little bit, not a scientific approach but it is for now serving our needs… But so far in our evaluations, it turned out we were right, through listening and conversations."

8.1.2.5 Ways of planning changes

Strategic planning processes were widely noted as the mechanism for assessing and potentially adopting major directions on an organizational level, when: "...We review why we do what we do, revise the way we do it so that it suits us, and look for innovative things and look at where the foundation should be in 10, 30 and 50 years and if the topic of communities is (which is probably a simple question to answer) what the foundation should deal with". In this sense it was perceived by several respondents as an important direction as they look towards the future.

Another respondent described how retreats were used for reflection and strategic planning of changes to approach: [There] "used to be a retreat, **we are at a transformation point** – how else should we work with the local community (besides what we already do)? What fits the original framework? We want to go back to having retreats where we have time to discuss these things; discussing new ways to fulfil the mission."

In one case, we heard a concern about stagnancy, where change had not come about: "We became more relaxed about the approach we have, the good effect it may have, **it depends on available capacity**, we had some turnover, **the program got stuck in a way**." At the same time, some respondents also mentioned that planning efforts were on hold now for a while and they intend to come back to them in the near future.

8.1.2.6 Wholesale change vs. adaptation of existing approaches

Respondents spoke about how changes are made in the organizations in different ways. In some cases, they preferred to make systematic changes at once and see how they work out. In other cases, they gave preference to regular changes or adaptation on a smaller scale. In one case, a respondent expressed a certain amount of dissatisfaction with changes as the rationale was not clear even though the group had agreed that changes needed to happen: "I think it wasn't wise to get rid of the consultant [advisor] group. [The program] was outdated, but some things were changed just for the sake of

change...The response was to try a different structure rather than adapting the existing structure."

In other cases, incremental change was appreciated by respondents; in one case we heard how one program was slowly but surely becoming more interwoven with themes from another program. Another respondent reflected on how her personal approach to making changes had changed: "I'm the one who starts from scratch…the years [here] have helped me to slightly revise my approach, to be more gentle…". She also appreciated an incremental way of doing things when she said: "Just when you're in it everyday, you can't see how much it's changed since you came. So maybe the changes are there, but they are non-drastic, you just can't grasp them on the day to day level."

One respondent noted that while the organization had not been afraid to make a major shift in strategy when it felt part of its mission had been accomplished: "We never changed the mission, we only modified it twice. One major change was that we stopped having NGO development as a pillar when we came to the conclusion that the mission was accomplished in regard to NGO development; community development and philanthropy have been there from the beginning". At the same time he noted the steadfast nature of the mission: "I always honored the fact that the mission provides strong guide rails and I have always tried to make the Board of Directors understand what we do, we did not push things, it would not work out well. Trying to find a way to do it, it took years of explaining, we change specific programs but we do not fundamentally change what we do."

8.1.2.7 From informal to formal

In some cases, respondents mentioned that their organizations are institutionalizing something that had previously worked informally or first informally testing new approaches before formally adopting them as a part of their support structure. A respondent explained how they had made capacity building a program component: "For many years we had used community advisors based on the British community model, where they were not so much as advisors from the community but a community-based assessor, that was the primary role. With some of them we parted ways, no longer personal motivation to remain in the program, no added value anymore, some others were extremely valuable, we reinvented their role as really advisors, counselors for the overall program. **We have introduced something formally that was informal before – the capacity building element**. It has been going on throughout most of our programming, grantmaking usually goes hand in hand with capacity building activity."

Nonetheless, in other cases, respondents also mentioned that letting the formal structure be a bit looser and opting for a more flexible system in which diverse needs can be answered is important to them.

8.1.3 Where should development be headed?

Several key themes emerged as respondents explained the directions they believe their organizations should pursue in supporting communities. Many of these issues have already been mentioned in the previous chapters, and thus the focus here is on the issues which respondents felt are important to develop further or be sustained into the future.

8.1.3.1 Introducing structure

There were repeated calls for structure, which manifested in various forms: systematically working with knowledge; establishing a sustainable operational structure; and laying out a clear theoretical framework. In the first case, the respondent appreciated the many years of practical experience that the organization had accumulated and wanted to channel this experience into a systematic knowledge base that could be shared with the broader community development field. In another setting, respondents related a desire to set up management and operations in a more sustainable fashion and create services out of their work. The third case revolved around a need for a firmer, shared theoretical footing for the organization that could also be introduced to new staff members and would permeate all of the organization's programs and interaction with grantees.

8.1.3.2 Individual support for grantees and proactive approach

As mentioned previously, some respondents told us that they seek to treat grantees in a more individualized way, to listen to their stories and offer them customized assistance rather than a fixed set of interventions. There was also a desire to actively seek out potential grantees instead of waiting for them to apply: "And in the short term, this is one of the things we want externally, so that grantees don't have to look through what we offer, but can just simply address us. So that we can actively look for projects around us, namely if one of us goes somewhere and sees that, for example, the foundation could help with something, so we too can actively address potential applicants."

8.1.3.3 Forging into new territory

Several respondents mentioned that expanding their organization's focus to new territories is also important for the future. In one case, it was about the organization seeking to be more present in different regions of its own country, and in another it was about the organization taking on a new role beyond its own national borders.

Thus we heard that one organization is considering developing a stronger presence throughout its country that would emphasize non-financial assistance: "...You map local stakeholders there, you map in terms of donors and those people who could help you reach local groups...there would be a lot of work with municipalities that could be offered, our online fundraising tool and mentoring; there are active municipalities who would like to try participation or community life and do not know about the tools, so support specific municipalities, mentoring rather." We learned that it is still in the conceptual phase, and it is unclear whether it will be a minimalistic version through PR, or a more systemic approach as described by this respondent.

In another setting, we heard a need for more exchange of experiences with partners from abroad and in yet another interview, a respondent noted that it was important to become aware that the organizations might face similar issues across different countries. Some respondents also mentioned that they have started to develop programs outside of their original national scope and intend to do so in the future.

8.2 External : Paradigm shifts we want to see in communities

A number of respondents talked about changes in paradigms that they would like to see in communities, or which they sense people would like to experience. Among them was a shift from hopelessness to hope: "People do not want to feel hopeless anymore. They want to change something, but need the tools to relearn how. We used to not be hopeless before."

Hope was closely tied to empowerment, noted by a respondent who wished for "communities – for them to understand how powerful they are, to focus on potentials and **the power of unity in reaching this potential** rather than just feeling hopeless."

This theme of unity was echoed by another respondent who wanted to see a shift from

fragmentation to cohesion: "Right now the priority really in Hungary is to create communities, and to be part of them, facilitate them; there are so many forces now in action which promote disintegration, create new fractions and trenches in society, so we have to counter that, and work for the community and **to stand next to each other, together**."

In a related thread, a respondent wanted to see people feel a stronger sense of belonging to community: "I expect that, ideally, it will **move people in the perception of the community as their home, in which it pays to invest**. That it's not just a place to sleep or some emergency situation that I'm there for. But that I look around and say, yeah, there are actually a lot of interesting things here that I enjoy, too, and I'm interested in, and I can find some sort of self-fulfillment here."

We also heard about what can bring about this type of paradigm shift is vibrancy in the community and the chance to influence community life: "…It makes great sense to me that **where something is happening** or I have the opportunity to be a part of or create something and my voice is heard, **I have a place there**, that is essential to caring about that place and wanting to live there. When we called the grantees before Christmas, some said that because something was happening there, people were starting to return. So it's important."

Speaking of reactions to migrants, one respondent spoke of a paradigm shift in which migrant events, and hence diversity, would be considered acceptable by society. Her comment explained how influenced she is by current social norms and how a person from the community questioned that: "Yes, it's awful when you start getting the ideas in your head – what is abnormal – and should we do this or not. But here a woman said let's just do it as if it were normal."

Another paradigm shift concerned residents moving from perceiving themselves as consumers to seeing themselves as self-organizers or co-creators: "At the café we do not provide services, it is community-based place/space, the people who come in are not consumers, they can create different kinds of clubs, groups, they can make coffee, tea, etc. These are not services."

In a similar vein, another respondent hoped to see a greater sense of personal responsibility for what happens in a community: "So they understand that they are responsible and should hold others responsible, self-actualization and accountability; to what extent are they able to formulate what they want and need and how can we help them achieve their vision? It stems from our theory of change: you can achieve change only through

participatory approach and by building partnerships. It doesn't matter what we think should happen in that community."

Another respondent mentioned that an important change might be focusing on the future rather than on the past or present, which might be beneficial for communities, also stressing that such change has in some cases already started: "Concern for children's future – that is what prompted many parents to engage in community, extreme desire to do something for their kids so their kids could have a good life in their community, even if the kids were going to leave at 18, they want the 18 years to be good."

CHAPTER 9

9. Diversity

We explored how respondents viewed diversity – within their own organizations, personally, and in communities – and whether they see organizations and/or communities addressing the issue and if so, how and why. We feel that is important to point out that diversity was something we asked respondents about directly because it was one of the primary issues we sought to address through the Community Alphabet program. Therefore, it is hard to assess whether diversity would have come up as an issue by itself had we not asked about it. And, in fact, some of the respondents told us that diversity has not been an issue in their organizations up to this point, and that they came up with examples because we asked them about it.

9.1 Perceptions of diversity within the organizations

When talking about diversity in their organizations, respondents in many cases spoke of the values that the work of their organization is based on. There was considerable variety in the perceptions of how diverse their colleagues' values are and whether or not it is a good thing to be in sync and standing up for the same values. Some respondents saw very little diversity, particularly in terms of values, in their own organizations: "**Because we all share the same mindset**, it can lead to a stereotype, a stereotypical perspective and classification as naive do-gooders. The inability to go beyond our own borders...". This respondent felt that this value homogeneity could result in a lack of understanding of what grantees grapple with day to day, and suggested contact with the field as a way to combat it. He continued: "In this context, contact with people outside, supported people in rural areas, helps a lot, they don't have a Prague point of view. I think this needs to be constantly strengthened. More going out, much more often into the streets, into the terrain, not to close oneself off. The basic mindset is correct, but sometimes we are out of touch with reality. The people we support really aren't concerned with whether or not someone is vegan. But this is just an example."

In the same vein, another respondent noted that an organization's strong value system can reinforce homogeneity by principle: "We look for candidates that are in line with this value system and that disqualifies some people who don't believe in tolerance, transparency, diversity, basic rights – they will not be employed and that **curtails our diversity in a way**".

In contrast, one respondent perceived substantial diversity linked to personal values, and considered it particularly challenging to manage: "[Diversity] exists inside [the organization], it shows up vividly during discussions, we as individuals are capable of developing value chasms between each other, there are big value differences, but the foundation manages to keep it together by moderating value discussions – it's the most difficult thing in the foundation and can hinder the organization of the foundation through the **projection of personal values into the values of the foundation**". In this aspect there seemed to be a difference when speaking about personal values versus the values respondents believe their organizations represent. Even though the respondents seemed to state very strongly what the values of their organizations are and that everyone shares them, there was in fact diversity in the organizational values that respondents named.

Others recognized diversity in competences, experience and communication style; these

differences were viewed by some as an advantage in the workplace: "I think it's a plus that in fact **we are all a bit different from one another**, it can just be beneficial in that you somehow complement each other, because everyone has a slightly different way of thinking or each one prefers something different, when we divide up tasks, it's kind of more natural for everyone to choose what suits them, because not everyone is the same, so it's easier, because otherwise we would all want the same thing."

9.2 Personal perceptions of diversity

When we explored how respondents perceive diversity personally, we found that the way they spoke about diversity in their personal experience in society was different from how they spoke about diversity in relation to their work supporting communities.

On the personal level, one respondent commented on increasing awareness of differences within the organization due to a recent team exercise: "The Insights process showed us how we are different from one another and how to deal with it" but another person saw a difference between acknowledging differences and knowing how to work with them: "We had the training for that recently, and I must say that since then we have at least known why this is happening. That doesn't mean it helped us get through it". It seemed that personal experience determined what is diverse and what is homogeneous. Relatedly, there were contrasting views on whether supported communities are diverse or homogenous; several did not see many differences, while others perceived diversity within single communities while others saw diversity between communities.

Empathy also arose in relation to diversity, as some respondents mentioned that personal experience created the potential for empathy: "We've already talked a bit about it, that I can empathize with that view of the grantee, so I think the program really gives those grantees a lot."

Another respondent also noted the importance of empathy to her work: "When I work in a community, I feel like I'm using empathy a lot – I am able to be aware of individual people and the mood of the group. I feel like I am connected to people in some way, and I'm trying to respond to how they feel. I don't know where it came from. I really don't know."

9.3 How communities perceive diversity

When we spoke with respondents about how people in supported communities perceive diversity, we mostly heard that **people in communities are unaccustomed to otherness and diversity is considered a threat rather than an asset**: "People acknowledge diversities but often don't see them as a strength but as a problem that needs to be dealt with in a way". Another respondent felt that "Communities aren't ready for topics like LGBT, transgender, migration, phenomena that will somehow come from the city."

Others told us that us vs. them thinking is very strong: "Our communities are extremely polarized, politically especially; Roma and other minorities are not enjoying the rights they should; acknowledgement of women's rights is still at a very rudimentary level. There is **still a lot of play on differences rather than on similarities and what we could work together on**."

In another setting we heard how a fear of otherness affects community support efforts: "The project did not come through because the anti-migrant propaganda was already strong and Greeks didn't want to speak out, **they didn't want to be associated with refugees.**" Yet in this same environment, prejudices did not hamper another project as anticipated: "They were really scared, who would give to migrants? But they raised the most money of all the organizations there, it meant a lot to them to feel this support; that we were standing by them and all these people were offering money."

We also heard the opinion that although this fear of otherness has deep historical roots, it is not necessarily unchangeable: "Standing out and diversity were not appreciated in the Communist era; this still remains to an extent. But it has changed, now the diversity of our community is a strength and you should work with it instead of trying to suffocate it."

One respondent noted that local power structures play a key role in determining the specific characteristics of a community and how it practices diversity: "The other places are run by e.g.government, churches, etc. The places are **very different depending on who is in charge.**"

Another respondent felt that diversity is connected to various needs and resources and that it was "important to know that some groups have specific needs but there are many common needs, and different kinds of resources – **every group or individual can provide different diversity in resources and in needs** – rural vs. city, Roma, migrant population, local, etc."

And we heard about cases where people challenge the dominant norms, such as a person who forged ahead with a migrant exhibition despite the prevailing view: "Yes, it's awful when you start getting the ideas in your head - what is abnormal – and should we do this or not. But here a woman said let's just do it as if it were normal". This courage was met with trepidation by others, who were nervous about sharing photos publicly and the team decided to use photos of objects rather than photos of people as a result. Other local residents went along with the norm-breaking exhibition but not enthusiastically, such as a shop owner who was asked to display the photos: "I asked the lady and she was not super excited but she did agree to have it there [in her shop] for a couple of days."

9.4 What makes diversity an issue?

We also asked what was motivating organizations to address diversity. In several instances the impulses came from external sources, such as donors which asked an organization to support a particular underprivileged group. A respondent explained an example in which, as a result of donor intervention, the organization had gradually shifted from a reluctance to focus on one particular group to providing dedicated outreach to underserved groups, but there was still significant ambivalence within the organization about how far to take this approach: "I don't think it's being discussed. It occurs to me that this is not a topic. We talked about it a bit with Roma projects. The foundation wants us to support more Roma projects and we decide whether we want to involve even more socially disadvantaged groups, for example, or whether we don't want to, and who our grantees actually are, and whether we want to target this area more or even talk about it externally. But that is not really addressed, somehow people are silent about it. We know internally that we want to reach out to the Roma community, but we do not do it publicly. And it's just me doing it."

Organizational processes can also open up diversity as a topic of discussion, we learned. This was the case in one organization, where an externally-led training on teamwork resulted in a recognition of the diversity among staff personalities; a respondent explained that there were "Lots of different personalities, we have more extroverted [where] the pace and style of communication are fast". This was perceived as a challenge and led to efforts to deal with the differences in daily interactions: "We look for compromises but one group is always dissatisfied, e.g. some need detail and depth of information, others need speed."

Sometimes the drivers are not clear – they might be personal values, or what staff sees

as relevant in the current social context. For example, respondents from one organization explained how they are trying to diversify selection committees, to bring people of different backgrounds and experience into the process, but they did not share where this effort originated.

9.5 Ways of addressing diversity

We also explored how diversity is addressed in community support frameworks. Some organizations, **acknowledging the spectrum of differences**, are trying to gradually **diversify their selection committees to better represent the population**, adding people of different backgrounds, ages, or professions: "We don't have unfortunately anyone Roma at this point, but we will. So we have rural, we have LGBT represented in the Board, we have women, kind of equal on men and women, we try to – it will develop more and more – it's been only one year since we reframed and redesigned. So it is still work under construction."

Others are considering diversity in hiring practices to bring in a spectrum of approaches, as one respondent told us: "Diversity is appreciated when hiring trainers. This is also why we have an external trainers' team because we like people who are not working in some system, or administration, who are freelancers, who are working in non-formal education, or formal education, so that **we have this kind of range of approaches to think about the approach**, we need to redesign the approach all the time if we want to follow the needs especially of young people."

Some organizations **reach out to underserved communities through gate keepers**, as we heard from one respondent: "I know from experience, and from theory I studied way back when, that Roma communities work a little differently, even the – how can I say it – even the fact that we managed to get some projects is because we go through their community leaders, that we addressed the stakeholders which we know there. We now have two new projects in the Liberec region, which we managed to get and that was through the Agency for Social Inclusion, which works with them, and through community leaders, through their network, but it is also only a part [of the community]. These are the active Roma who want to do something for their community."

Another approach is **building connections through shared activities**, which are designed to give people chances to encounter and have positive experiences with otherness in non-threatening settings. One organization holds intercultural events centered around

preparing food, which have been well-received. As a respondent explained, they also compile stories highlighting universal values, emotions and exhibit them "in a big format in unexpected places, e.g. a school, ice cream parlor, library, hair stylist and then an exhibition at the food market hall, so that many people would see it, people who are not necessarily museum goers."

Some respondents noted how **concentrating on individuals**' specific characteristics can help diversity: "But each is an individual personality, each is different, each has a different need, each has a different style of communication. So really it's absolutely true that I have to take a different approach to each person."

Another approach that a respondent related was **building a network of diverse people across different sectors**: "We tried to connect the associations in some way, as part of one of the things here, it's been a few years now. And it worked out quite well, and now the clubs aren't meeting anymore, but because everyone just has enough problems of their own, it's like everywhere, but it actually worked out that the people know each other across those communities, who do different things, whether they do amateur theater or just deal with various other things, and I actually think that in this respect it works quite well, that I need the One World festival when I needed to connect with someone like that, because I like to connect it as a local, it was nice that I already know who to turn to, and in fact I am happy that the people turn to me."

Finally, we also heard about attempts to build openness into the community support approach: "We encourage them to be as open and transparent as possible and involve as many people as possible."

CHAPTER 10

10. Conclusions

As mentioned at the beginning of the report, the original purpose of conducting the interviews was to get informed and better understand the realities of three organizations in three Central and Eastern European countries so that we could develop a capacity building program for them. During the data analysis process, we began to see particular patterns in what respondents spoke of that helped us in this effort. We utilized a lot of the learning in our development of the program content and we continue to do so.

Summarizing what we learned from the interviews is a challenging task, as there is a great variety of topics and diversity in how respondents understood them. Yet, some issues turned out to be relevant to most respondents: social aspects, interactions, relationships or lack thereof in communities. It seems that people and building relationships among them are at the core of understanding what communities are and how to support them. Supporting interactions in communities or capacity building of its members appeared in many interviews and respondents seemed to place great importance on both areas. There are many places in the report where we tried to reflect that and relate it to different issues.

There are also some topics that may be worthy of more attention, which we did not have the capacity or the aim to address in greater detail however we do find it important to mention them here.

Many respondents reflected on the status quo of their organizations and communities in which they work and often compared them to an "ideal", a vision they have of well-functioning communities and/or of their work. These visions were sometimes clearly articulated, while at other times they seemed to be rather intuitive or even subconscious. Those which were given sharp contours by the respondents are presented in the report. Interestingly enough, some patterns of this "ideal" seemed to be shared by the respondents no matter their background. It might be interesting to see whether this commonality is caused by the similar settings of the organizations, due to a similarity among the values the respondents perceive as important or embedded in the concepts underlying the respondents' work. These questions remain to be answered.

Many respondents also reflected on how social or political circumstances in their country influence communities and their organizations. Some respondents, and this may be country specific, also mentioned that development of local communities influences the broader picture in the country, and that what happens locally can transform the national reality. It might be interesting to look more deeply into this issue to better understand possible connections between the social and political situation and life of the communities; we did not as our capacities were limited and our focus elsewhere.

There is yet another area we could have focused on – a comparative analysis related to the Central and Eastern European reality and whether there are similarities or differences across the region appearing through the interviews. There were some "regional" reflections present in the interviews; some were connected to history and its influence on the current state of affairs in the communities, and some respondents compared situations regionally

within their countries of operation while other respondents compared the situation in their country with their neighbours. Such reflections seemed to support respondents in their ability to better understand their own reality and create a possible benchmark of how well off communities in their countries are. It also seemed to support respondents in other ways - seeing the diversity of ways of how "things can be done" and that working with partners from abroad can be of mutual benefit. It would have been interesting to look further at such influences, but as it was not our primary focus there are not enough data to draw a deeper analysis or draw further conclusions other than the ones you find in the report.

Looking at the report from another angle, we would like to mention that there were also three issues that we were particularly interested in and which, to some extent, were the main reasons for the initial assessments. These were the issues of polarization, diversity and resources. This is why there are specific chapters on resources and diversity in the report. As mentioned in the introduction, the asset-based community development approach is at the core of our program and we were curious to learn how resources are perceived by people in the organizations which were to be involved in the program. As you can read in the report, respondents mentioned resources often and gave many examples of resources they see when working with communities. At the same time, many respondents understood resources as something created during the process of supporting communities – not necessarily a starting point for community building. As mentioned by several respondents, the needs of the communities and supporting communities in solving their problems seems to be a more frequently experienced paradigm.

In our view, the issues of diversity and polarization were the opposite sides of the same coin. As explained in the introduction, some representatives of the organizations named polarization as an issue that brings many challenges to communities and seems to be difficult to tackle. It was one of the reasons why we had been curious about what polarization was about. As we read different studies and articles about polarization before starting to develop the program and conduct the interviews, we realized that polarization, at least as described and spoken of by many experts, happens when diversity is feared and seen as a problem. That led us to ask ourselves the question of how diversity is viewed, understood and supported in the daily life of the organizations. As you can read in the report, many respondents spoke of diversity and/or polarization at one point or another. How much it was affected by us specifically asking about it and how much it is a part of the discussion within the organizations we cannot assess. In that sense, we also cannot assess whether and how perceiving diversity as a resource rather than

seeing it as a problem can support communities in becoming better-functioning places and whether such an approach needs to start from diversity becoming a value practiced all through the work of the organizations, or if there are also other ways to go about it. What we heard from some respondents is that diversity in some cases has become a cornerstone of some changes that have started to happen in their work. To understand it more deeply, further interviews would be needed.

All these reflections came from the interviews themselves. We also learned a lot through, and about, the interview, data analysis and report writing process as we went along. Neither of us is a formally educated researcher and our previous experience with research was very limited. And this effort was not the only thing we had on our agendas; we were both involved in other activities as well. Yet one thing was clear, which supported or even pushed us on: we knew that if we collected the information from interviews, the program that we were planning would have a better chance of responding to the needs and situations of the potential participants and their organizations. And we had one great benefit and a resource - good contacts to people in these organizations as well as their interest in most cases. And with the report now finalized we believe the effort has paid off!

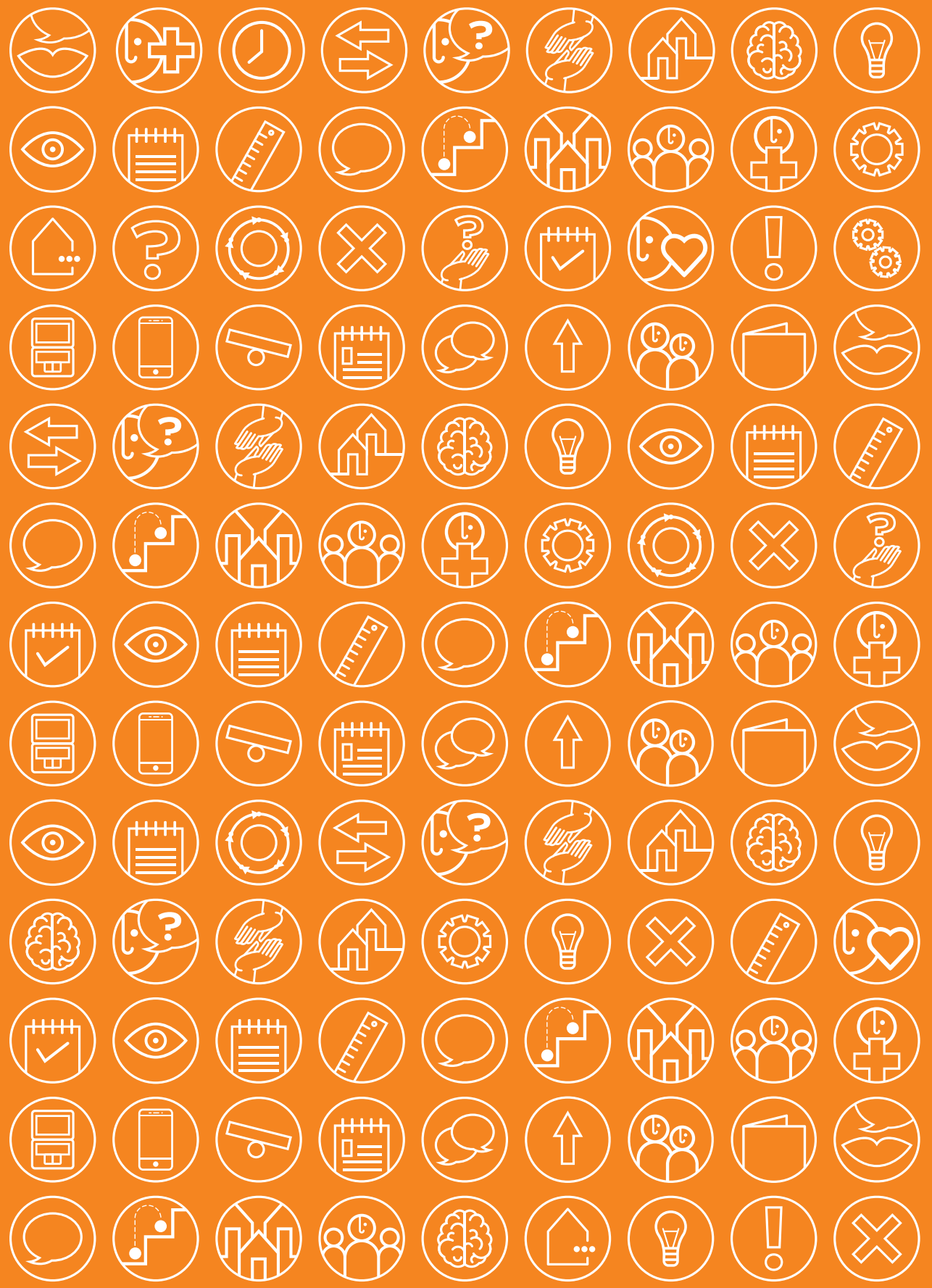
CHANGING THE PARADIGM

Reflections on Community Support in Three Central and Eastern European Non-profit Organizations

Authors: Monika Novosadová, Helen Lenda
Foreword by Lenka Dušková
Graphic design: Eva Chmelová
Published by: Via Foundation, Prague, 2021

ISBN: 978-80-907586-5-0

NADACE VIA



NADACE VIA

CHANGING THE PARADIGM

Monika Novosadová, Helen Lenda
Foreword by Lenka Dušková

ISBN: 978-80-907586-5-0