HANDBOOK ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS A TOOL OF ENHANCING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

European Community Organizing Network

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A Cooperative Project between the Grundtvig "Community Learning – Building Capacity and Empowerment for Active Citizenship" Project & The European Community Organizing Network

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Handbook, created in the framework of a cooperative project between a Grundtvig Learning Partnership and the European Community Organizing Network (ECON) presents community organizing as a practice of fuller engaging citizens in public decisions that affect their lives. After a short explanation and description of community organizing both in the United States and in Europe and a comparison with other means of intervention in the community, the Handbook presents five concrete community organizing examples from the four Grundtvig partners, as well as, four additional examples from members of the European Community Organizing Network (ECON). These case studies illustrate how residents and citizens in city neighbourhoods and villages were able to participate through democratic processes to identify priority themes and achieve solutions in cooperation with governmental and business leaders. The list of accomplishments in these nine locations are impressive and include infrastructure improvements (the construction of a footbridge in Saarbrücken, the clean-up and paving of an alley and the modernization of a park in Bucharest, new parking lots in Katowice, new parking rules in Bucharest, and the renovation of a bus stop in Moldova), more sanitary and environmentally-sound garbage collection and separation in Bonn, the prevention of a gas station to be built in the city center in Banska Bystrica and the purchase of needed hospital equipment in Moldova.

In addition to the concrete and visible neighbourhood and village improvements that have occurred as a result of citizen participation strategies, this Handbook tells a deeper story about the human spirit when ordinary people work together for the common good. The nine case studies (especially those from Central and Eastern Europe) contain the stories of residents listening to and working with each other, overcoming the lingering post-communist fear of engaging in public life. It is the story of struggle, at-times disappointment and fatigue, and then the self-confidence, empowerment, and hope that comes when goals and dreams are achieved. It is a story that has been repeated countless times throughout history when citizens participate in the democratic process. While every story has its unique aspects, community organizing has provided a set of strategies and best practices for the participants in these case studies to utilize and build upon.

The nine community groups contained in the case studies have plans to continue their work, and in some cases to expand to new neighbourhoods, villages, cities, and regions. They face, however, common challenges that have been underlined throughout the case studies and conclusions of the Handbook. Among these challenges is to find the necessary seed funding to employ a professional community organizer, an essential component for a community organizing process to thrive. A second common challenge, especially in Central and Eastern Europe where civic participation was suppressed for forty-five years or longer, is for citizens and residents to construct sustainable and democratic organizations, capable of involving more and more people to solve problems over a long-term period of time. The case studies in this Handbook, however, offer the hope and promise that these challenges will be successfully met and overcome.

The Handbook ends with a list of references and resources in English and European languages for those who wish to learn more about and implement community organizing in their communities.

INTRODUCTION

This "Handbook on Citizen Participation" is the result of the EU Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme "Community Learning – Building Capacity and Empowerment for Active Citizenship" Project in cooperation with the European Community Organizing Network (ECON). The four partners in this Grundtvig Project were the Resource Center for Public Participation (CeRe) in Bucharest, Romania; the Bona Fides Association in Katowice, Poland; the Anti-Poverty Network in Budapest, Hungary; and Diakonie in Bonn, Germany. The main objectives of this Grundtvig Project were to learn methods to help engage people of local communities in influencing their community life more actively and build citizens' capacity and empowerment.

The primary method used by the Grundtvig partners in this Project was community organizing. Community organizing has a seventy-year tradition in the United States and has been rapidly growing in Europe during the past ten years. Community organizing is a democratically-governed long-term process by which people are brought together to act in their common self-interest to identify community problems and solutions, and to take action by engaging existing power structures to make those solutions a reality.

The Project also wanted to build a strong partnership between EU organizations involved in teaching active citizen participation. The Project achieved its aims and objectives through:

- ◆ ongoing activities involving volunteers to solve community problems based on the method of community organizing;
- ◆ four joint gatherings for sharing, comparing, and evaluating our local experiences with active citizen participation and teaching methods held in Bucharest, Bonn, Katowice, and Budapest;
- ◆ an initial planning meeting held in Szczecin, Poland and a final dissemination meeting organized in Bucharest, Romania;
- ◆ the publication of the "Handbook on citizen participation" as a reflection on the local work carried out during this 2 years Grundtvig Partnership.

In preparing this Handbook, the Grundtvig partners were assisted by the experiences of the members and expertise of the European Community Organizing Network (ECON). Founded in 2008, the mission of ECON is to promote, support, and expand community organizing in Europe. With members in nine countries (Bosnia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, and the Ukraine), ECON provides trainings, consulting, and other resources to organizations wanting to implement community organizing. ECON has also organized exchanges between organizers and volunteers within Europe and with the United States, as well as, hosts an annual meeting for training and the exchange of experiences and best practices.

The partners of this Project wish to thank the European Commission, in particular the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme and the National Agencies in each country for their financial support for both this Handbook and for a very productive experience of learning and exchange with others in the European community.

WHY ORGANIZE?

The past 20 years have been times of major change in Central and Eastern Europe. Progress has been made in transitioning to democratic governing structures, market-based economies, connecting to Western Europe, and developing a new civil society and NGO sector. Nevertheless, these developments have been uneven from country-to-country and now the whole of Europe faces major new challenges due to the current global economic crisis such as high unemployment, cuts in needed governmental services, and the rise of poverty, nationalism, and discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities.

Even as progress has been made, there is the need to develop a culture of active and democratic citizen participation at the local, regional, and national levels. This need has been observed by many, including the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe when they wrote: "The paradox of today's democracies is that, although never ever in the past have so many people lived in democracies, never were so many people disappointed with the **quality of the democracy** they live in and experience on a daily basis…We are witnessing a huge concentration of power and money, and very often also a huge concentration of the media, in the hands of a few, so that our democratic institutions become vulnerable." ("Democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives", May 26, 2010, pages 6 and 10)

And as sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf points out, one should expect the building of healthy democracy and active citizen participation to be a long-term process. "It takes six months to create new political institutions, to write a constitution and electoral laws. It may take six years to set up a half-way viable economy. It will probably take sixty years to create a civil society. Autonomous institutions are the hardest things to bring out." ("Has the East joined the West?", New Perspective Quarterly, 7:2, Spring, 1990, page 42)

Citizens' ability to meaningfully participate and speak for themselves in the new democratic and capitalist systems is also severely constrained due to a lack of experience and exposure to grassroots democratic practice. Strategies from the community organizing tradition offer one of the best opportunities for the development of active, powerful, and democratic citizen participation.

Community organizing as a distinct form of citizens' participation best practices began with the work of Saul Alinsky in the United States in 1938. Thousands of community organizations currently exist in the United States and around the world, giving ordinary citizens the chance to shape their villages, neighbourhoods, and cities. Community organizing has successfully addressed themes related to infrastructure improvements, employment and job training, integration of migrants into mainstream society, activities for youth, health care, housing, challenges faced by the elderly, drugs and crime. It has worked with low-income and middle-class persons, migrants, homeless and disabled persons, senior citizens, the unemployed, and others. Through community organizing, ordinary citizens have taken an active role in the democratic process, helping to make governmental and business actions more accountable and transparent.

Why organize? Because the active and powerful participation of citizens in decision-making processes that shape their neighbourhoods, villages, cities, nations, and the whole of Europe is the vital component of a healthy democracy. And also because the times within which we live pose challenges that require citizens guided by values of compassion and justice, tolerance and appreciation of diversity to be powerful players in the public arena.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ORGANIZING?

A. Definition of Community Organizing

Community organizing is a democratically-governed long-term process by which people are brought together to act in their common self-interest to identify community problems and solutions, and to take action by engaging existing power structures to make those solutions a reality.

4 Steps of the Community Organizing Process:

1. Systematically listening to residents and citizens in order to select and prioritize problems and visions.

2. Identifying potential solutions, and the people and institutions that can make those solutions possible.

3. Take action to solve problems by engaging those people and institutions identified through negotiation, using confrontation and pressure when necessary.

4. Build large, sustainable, and democratic groups capable of addressing numerous problems, needs, and wishes in the community.

B. Description of Community Organizing

While community organizing can take different forms (organization of individuals or an organization of organizations, such as NGO's, tenant associations, labour and women's groups, religious congregations, etc.) and involve different constituencies (a neighbourhood or village, migrants, persons with disabilities, homeless persons, etc.), community organizing always begins with listening – with identifying the interests, concerns, and visions of the citizens involved. During this first step of community organizing, another important goal is to build relationships of trust and respect among the citizens, often of diverse backgrounds. Persons are much more likely to get involved in the democratic process when their primary interests are being addressed and when they are engaged with others they trust and respect. Following a systematic listening process, citizens democratically select a manageable number of priority themes they can solve.

Identifying potential solutions includes conducting research about how a problem can be solved (for example, seeking successful examples from other neighbourhoods or cities that can be transferred to our area) and which institution (city council, governmental administration, school system, police, local business, etc.) has the authority and resources to assist. While some themes can be solved by groups of volunteers acting alone, citizens often need the assistance of key institutions to address their concerns and visions.

When citizens have identified potential solutions, they take action by meeting with authorities in both negotiating meetings where the problems and solutions can be discussed and resolved, and in large meetings where the community organization demonstrates its "power in numbers" and where authorities are asked to publicly commit to solving the problem with specific actions. Citizens are often ignored when they individually present their problems to public authorities. When citizens join together in large numbers, however, their power and influence to make change is significantly increased.

In the midst of listening, research, and action, community organizing also involves citizens in the process of building a long-term, sustainable, and democratically-governed community organization capable of addressing numerous problems and visions. Such an organization develops the democratic participation skills of large numbers of citizens, including fundraising skills that allow the organization to hire a community organizer who assists in training, recruiting, and mobilizing members of the organization and its allies.

C. Community Organizing Compared to Other Forms of Community Interventions

Community organizing works <u>with</u> people, as compared to *social work* which does <u>for</u> people. *Advocacy* involves persons who speak for others, while community organizing empowers citizens to speak for themselves. *Community development* often involves partnerships between citizens and public authorities. Community organizing also seeks to work with public authorities, but it recognizes that confrontation and pressure are sometimes necessary to hold authorities accountable. *Movements* and *citizen initiatives* often focus on a single theme, whereas community organizing seeks to build a long-term, democratically-governed organization capable of successfully addressing numerous themes.

D. Brief History and Current Practice of Community Organizing in the United States

Community organizing began in the United States in 1938 with the work of Saul Alinsky. It grew rather slowly in its first twenty to thirty years, but then grew rapidly in the 1960's and 1970's. Thousands of community organizations currently exist, many of which are linked together through networks capable of providing training, consulting, and the opportunity to work together on common themes at a city-wide, regional, and national level. Community organizing became even better known in the United States during the 2008 presidential campaign when the then candidate Barack Obama often spoke of his experiences as a community organizer in Chicago for three years following his university studies.

Community organizing in the United States is financially supported by a growing number of foundations which recognize that investing in citizens' participation often provides greater results than investing in charity projects. A typical community organization in the United States also raises

a significant part of its own budget for staff, leadership training, and office expenses through membership dues and fundraising activities. Almost all community organizations are incorporated as non-profit organizations (NGO's) with a written constitution which states its guiding values, as well as, its procedures for electing leadership and making decisions in a democratic fashion. Numerous books have been written and websites established which share the history, successes, and best practices of community organizing in the United States.

E. Brief History of Community Organizing in Europe

Community organizing has existed in Europe for approximately twenty years. Early examples include the formation of the German Forum Community Organizing (FOCO), established after university students compared American community organizing to German forms of group social work, and the formation of the Slovak Center for Community Organizing (CKO) which initially received funding from the National Democratic Institute and others who wished to support democratic practices in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the past five years community organizing has been rapidly expanding in Central, Eastern, and Western European countries, successfully winning neighbourhood infrastructure improvements, better garbage collection, more activities for young people, more green space, etc. Their efforts have been supported by groups like the European Community Organizing Network (ECON), training and consulting visits by American community organizers, and exchanges among European community organizers and volunteers to learn from each other. The community organizing model has shown itself to be flexible in adapting to different cultural and institutional contexts.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE – COMMUNITY ORGANIZING CASE STUDIES

Community Organizing in Germany

In the early 1990's, a group of students at the University in Freiburg wrote their senior thesis comparing community organizing in the United States with a form of German community social work. This study led to two week-long community organizing trainings in Germany conducted by two American community organizers, the formation of the Forum Community Organizing (FOCO – a membership organization dedicated to promoting community organizing in Germany), and a study trip by FOCO members to Chicago to learn more about community organizing. FOCO invited and helped support two American community organizers to live and work in Germany, either to assist in the building of community organizations or to assist organizations use community organizing strategies in their work.

FOCO remains active and is a significant partner in the European Community Organizing Network (ECON). In addition, various organizations in the German Protestant Church have supported the development of community organizing through joint regional, national, and international trainings; consulting and trainings for local community organizing projects; and the involvement of Diakonie service offices and parishes in local community organizing projects.

Like in other European countries, community organizing in Germany faces the challenges of raising money for community organizers and developing long-term, democratic organizational structures capable of engaging larger numbers of residents and citizens. Significant progress, however, has been made during the past five years and the interest in community organizing continues growing in Germany. Community organizing is currently being used in Baesweiler, Berlin, Bonn, Düren, Hamburg, Leipzig, Neuruppin, Saarbrücken, Stuttgart, and Uslar.

1. Saarbrücken – from Doing <u>for</u> People to Doing <u>with</u> People

Introduction

Stadtteilbüro Malstatt (Neighborhood Office in Malstatt) provides a broad range of services to the residents of the Malstatt neighbourhood in the German city of Saarbrücken. The Malstatt neighbourhood has approximately 10,000 residents with a large concentration of low-income, unemployed, and migrant persons. With the assistance of the German Forum Community Organizing (FOCO) in 2007, the staff of Stadtteilbüro Malstatt and some residents received training in community organizing. They initiated their first community organizing process in December, 2007. This initial process not only won a € 1.1 million infrastructure improvement for the Malstatt neighbourhood, it also began a process that is transforming the work of Stadtteilbüro Malstatt, as well as, the neighbourhood's relationship with government officials.

First Community Organizing Process – 2008

In December, 2007 and January, 2008 three staff persons from Stadtteilbüro Malstatt initiated its first community organizing process by conducting over 50 face-to-face visits with low-income and migrant residents, listening for neighbourhood problems and visions. On February 14, 2008 an assembly was held with 30 residents to report on the problems and visions heard during these visits and to democratically prioritize themes that residents wished to address. During this process it was learned that the city of Saarbrücken had plans to destroy a much used footbridge which crosses railroad tracks in the middle of Malstatt and connects the two main sections of the neighbourhood. The city stated that this 50-year-old footbridge was growing dangerous and too costly for ongoing repairs.

Residents with the help of staff conducted research and other activities during the months of February-April, 2008. Among other things, they learned that over 1,000 residents use the footbridge on a daily basis (children attending school, persons wishing to go shopping and visit their neighbours, etc.). Over 2,800 signatures were gathered in support of repairing or replacing the footbridge. Over 40 neighbourhood organizations (churches and clubs) and professionals (shop owners, doctors, etc.) wrote support statements. On April 23, 2008 a public meeting of 125 residents was held with leaders of the four political parties represented in the Saarbrücken City Council, seeking their support for the repairing or replacing of the footbridge. All four political party leaders pledged their support and in July, 2008 the Saarbrücken City Council voted € 1.1 million for the building of a new footbridge. On September 22, 2010 the new footbridge was opened and dedicated with a festival attended by about 250 residents and city leaders. 20 residents were actively involved in planning this festival.

Besides the very tangible result of the new footbridge, many other things resulted from these initial community organizing efforts. First and foremost, residents learned that their ideas and actions can make a difference, that citizen participation has direct benefits. Second, there was a strong desire to continue using community organizing strategies to tackle other pressing problems and achieve other neighbourhood visions. But to do so, it was felt that resources must be found to fund a staff person to assist residents in these efforts – the staff of Stadtteilbüro Malstatt could not do both community organizing and the service work called for in their work contracts. Third, interest in the use of community organizing strategies grew in surrounding neighbourhoods and with city officials as a way to encourage greater citizen participation. And finally, there was a desire to connect with others in Germany and Europe who were using similar strategies in order to be able to share experiences and learn from one another.

Follow-Up Steps and Conclusion

Since their community organizing process in 2008, Stadtteilbüro Malstatt has worked with other neighbourhood stakeholders and the city of Saarbrücken in renovating a large abandoned field surrounded by two churches and a school into a facility for youth and family activities. Stadtteilbüro Malstatt and the city of Saarbrücken also cooperated in securing an eighteen-month pilot project grant from the German national government in order to expand community organizing in the Malstatt neighbourhood and build a long-term residents/citizens organization ("Malstatt Together Strong"). In the Spring of 2012, a second listening process with 200 residents was conducted along with a 45 person issues assembly in which action groups of residents were formed to begin looking for solutions to issues related to neighbourhood security

and beautification, traffic, cultural opportunities, and senior activities. Finally, staff and volunteers from the Malstatt neighbourhood are active participants in the German Forum Community Organizing (FOCO) and the European Community Organizing Network (ECON), giving them the opportunity to share their successes and experiences with, as well as, learn from others doing community organizing.

The staffs of Stadtteilbüro Malstatt and the city of Saarbrücken have moved from a social service model of doing things <u>for</u> residents, to a community organizing model of doing things <u>with</u> residents – giving a direct voice to the problems and visions of ordinary citizens.

2. Bonn – Saving Money and the Environment with Better Garbage Collection

The Tannenbusch neighbourhood is on the northern border of the City of Bonn. It has approximately 10,000 residents of over 100 ethnicities and diverse backgrounds. Many schools, shopping and sport facilities are located in the district, nevertheless it suffers from a reputation as an unsafe and welfare-dependent part of the city. The outward appearance is dominated by high-rise social housing buildings, which partly are in a very poor condition due to the fact that most flats are owned by hedge-fund companies. These housing companies are not willing to invest in their buildings in this particular area, culminating in heating systems breaking down and mildew being found in flats. The unwillingness of the housing companies to come to a consensus with the tenants and city representatives, trying to work out a concept for the future development of the district, has been subject to local and regional and news coverage.

Community Organizing in Tannenbusch was initiated by the Stadtteilbüro (neighbourhood office) Diakonie and started with over 120 interviews taking place from November 2009 to February 2010. After an assembly in May, 2010 working groups were formed focussing on topics such as employment, security, education and waste in the district. The theme of waste was decided to be addressed as the top priority.

The neighbourhood's waste problem was a rather special challenge. The social housing buildings, built in the late 1960's, were equipped with an underground tube system, pumping the trash directly from certain littering stations, without having the need of separating the trash in advance. The district therefore was not supplied with usual trash cans. As the City of Bonn decided to shut down the underground system, the housing companies were obliged to establish an alternative concept for taking care of the district's trash. Although those companies managed to supply the neighbourhood with trash cans, they failed to provide options for trash separation which is not only an environmental factor, but also an economic factor as the costs of waste disposal, which has to be paid by the tenants, tripled under the new system.

Several weeks after the resident's group, by then having created the name inTakt (in Tannenbusch active) and a logo, had made the decision on the topic and published it, one of the housing companies surprisingly addressed inTakt, requesting the group to support the company's attempt of improving the previously established waste system. After discussing the opportunities and potential problems that might occur, inTakt decided to cooperate with the disposal company hired by the housing company. Shortly after this commitment, the neighbourhood was finally supplied with enough trash cans to allow waste separation, an achievement that took over 8 months from when the old system was shut down. This garbage separation solution is not only environmentally friendly, but also saves residents approximately 300 Euro per year.

InTakt also accompanied house calls made by employees of the disposal company, pasted information about waste-separating in trash cans and organized an event in December 2010 in order

to inform tenants about the new system and the economic advantages of trash separation. InTakt received positive feedback from the disposal company and the garbage collection of the City of Bonn that the new system was accepted and therefore in conclusion successfully established.

After starting a new listening process in February 2011, inTakt faced great obstacles as the group lost its community organizer who could not be funded any longer. Since then inTakt consists completely of volunteers, which makes it difficult to keep track of multiple issues.

The Grundtvig-sponsored visit by inTakt group members in January 2011 was an enormous promoter for building personal relations between the group members. Those relations and the exchange with the other groups attending the Grundtvig exchange also led to a strong identification with the actions of inTakt and the method of community organizing.

When organizing Grundtvig-sponsored exchange in Bonn on September 16-17, 2011, inTakt also took the opportunity to present community organizing to a broader audience and therefore invited city representatives, the city administration and the public to join the Grundtvig exchange partners in a two hour discussion. During this event inTakt presented the work done in Tannenbusch, but also promoted the method of community organizing in general by collaborating with the exchange partners who gave examples of their own work. Partially opening the exchange programme therefore helped to underline the possibilities of community organizing through the sharing of success stories, as well as highlighting community organizing as a method emerging all over Europe.

Community Organizing in Romania

Community organizing is not a common citizen participation strategy in Romania even though elements of organizing – participatory identification of community problems, campaign tactics, confrontation with public authorities and others – have been present in community development processes and advocacy campaigns since the 1990s. The missing element that community organizing brought, if compared with other strategies, was the intentional and active building of membership organizations with a long-term commitment to solve multiple issues in their communities through negotiation and confrontation with decision-makers.

Seminars and trainings on community organizing have been held in Romania on a small scale since 2000, but the actual implementation of the method has started in Drobeta Turnu Severin with ARCS (Romanian Association of Counselling and Support) and in Bucharest where CeRe (The Resource Center for public participation) began a community organizing project in 2009 in several medium and low-income neighbourhoods of Bucharest.

1. Bucharest, Lacul Tei - A Neighbourhood with a Civic Spark

Protests over neighbourhood issues are not common in Bucharest, but one such protest was organized in Lacul Tei neighbourhood in 2008, when people went crazy over the local authorities' lack of strategy related to parking. After long ignoring the issue of parking space scarcity in Lacul Tei, the local authorities gave a final blow to car owners in November 2008, by enlisting on the main boulevard under a no parking rule in order to ease traffic flow. A day after the decision was made, a private contractor started towing the cars that were parked on Lacul Tei Boulevard. The towing became an ongoing practice and the fines were huge. Ironically, the majority of the towed cars were owned by neighbourhood people that used the boulevard as a parking space, in lack of a better option.

It took a month for people to organize themselves and in December, 2008 a protest was organized, in order to draw attention to the problem – people in the neighbourhood used the pedestrian crossings to block the

traffic for one hour on the main boulevard. The protest caught the Mayor's attention, but his only feedback was sending police enforcement to ensure the peacefulness of the demonstration. No other follow-up came from the local authorities, so neighbourhood people went silent. Nevertheless, the protest did leave a mark in the history of the city, so CeRe's staff was quick to remember it when deciding upon which neighbourhoods should be chosen for its first community organizing project in Bucharest. Community organizing would take the not-so-common civic spark of Lacul Tei's inhabitants to a new level, enriching it with a long-term vision, better issue planning, and citizen commitment.

Community Organizing Begins

CeRe's intervention in Lacul Tei started in late 2009 in the traditional way, with a listening process. The community organizer talked with over 120 inhabitants, shop-owners and school teachers, and became familiar with the most important issues in the neighbourhood. The organizer also brought together a handful of people that were ready to take action to make their neighbourhood a better place. The first activity of the newly formed initiative group was a public meeting for neighbourhood people, in April 2010. 50 inhabitants attended, were presented with the findings of the listening process, and voted on the issues that should be tackled first. Not surprisingly, parking place scarcity was still on top of the list, together with citizen safety, thermal insulation of blocks of flats, and cleanliness issues.

Winning the Parking Issue

These were the circumstances under which Lacul Tei inhabitants took hold again of their ongoing parking issue in late 2010. Members of the newly formed initiative group analyzed the problem, researched the current legislation and went over various possible solutions by themselves. It was a lengthy and tiresome process for the initiative group, to face an issue that affects not only their neighbourhood but the whole city and has no easy solution. Some of the group's members even dropped out when faced with such a complex matter. Nevertheless, assisted by the community organizer and an urban planner , the group finally came up with the best short term solution – they decided to ask the Street Administration to allow parking on Lacul Tei Boulevard in the 7.30 pm – 7.30 am interval during weekdays, and 24 hours-a-day during weekends and legal holidays. The solution had its benefits – it involved no major costs, was fast to put in practice, and did not interfere with the day-time issue of high traffic.

A well-reasoned petition was drafted and members of the initiative group asked presidents of Owners Associations on Lacul Tei Boulevard to endorse it, which led to further consultation over the proposed solution. 6 Owners' Associations, representing over 1000 persons, decided to endorse the petition that was submitted to the Street Administration of Bucharest City Hall in June 2011. The Street Administration readily accepted the inhabitants' proposal and promised to deliver by the end of August, much to the delight of the initiative group who promoted the success to the neighbourhood. But time passed and the change did not take place. The inertia of the public administration had negative consequences on people's energy and trust and the organizer needed to take the problem back to the neighbourhood and bring new people in to help the initiative group pressure the decision-makers.

After two months of phone calls, written complaints, and a face-to-face visit, one night in November 2011, the awaited notice boards appeared under the no-parking signs on Lacul Tei Boulevard, announcing the new parking rules to everyone.

Lacul Tei Initiative Group

Perseverance was the key to winning the parking issue, but there was a price to pay in group members' energy. So in the fall of 2011, a new listening process started in Lacul Tei to enlarge the initiative group with new members and take the pulse of the neighbourhood once again. The new forces that arose were vital for putting the final pressure needed to win the parking issue. Moreover, new issues appeared that people are willing to take on, with a renewed sense of possibility. Besides a concrete alleviation of the parking situation, confidence and credibility for the initiative group were the most important gains of the organizing process in Lacul Tei.

2. Bucharest, Callatis – Making Promises Come True

The Starting Point

If in neighbourhoods like Lacul Tei or Drumul Taberei (Favorit area), people's previous activism convinced us to intervene and encourage sporadic civic activities to turn into systematic and strategic campaigns, the story was different in Callatis' case. Residents are those who come to us complaining about their neighbourhood's problems and about the lack of response from the City Hall.

As in other neighbourhoods, the community organizer started a listening process through door to door interviews. Over 100 visits with residents were done during May-June 2010. The problems were similar to what we have heard in other areas of Bucharest, from the lack of parking, poor cleaning of green spaces and streets, citizen safety and thermal insulation of the block of flats. Lots of the problems mentioned were too big to tackle and the group decided to address at first a small and winnable issue – the cleaning and pavement of an alley between two schools that connected two major parts of the neighbourhood. The alley was in the state of a country side road, with no pavement, mud, tall grass on the sides, but much more disturbing, it was full of garbage and the home of stray dogs, which made it dangerous for children to cross. It took two months (September – October 2010), a meeting with a local councillor, a petition and a public event on the alley for the local administration to clean and pave the passage.

After their first quick success, the group scattered its energy in several directions: green spaces improvements, better garbage collection, separate waste collection and other important themes. Their actions – petitions and meetings with different officials – led to no clear conclusions. It took several months for the leaders of the group to accept that they needed a more focused and specific approach. Finally, in September 2011 the group took hold again of the green spaces issue, this time focusing on the modernization of one park in the neighbourhood – The Istru Park.

The Modernization of the Istru Park – Steps in the Campaign

Before addressing local authorities, the group collected the needs and ideas of their neighbours concerning the modernization of the park. Based upon their wishes and with the help of an urban planner, they put together a detailed request on what the park should look like in the future (replacement of broken and purchase of new playground equipment for different group ages, replacement of the sand surface with something more durable, and so on). The request, submitted to the public administration (ADPU) and the Local Council, was endorsed by 80 signatures from the residents living in the proximity of the park.

In October, 2011 the group organized a public event in a local school with a two-fold purpose: bringing residents together around a common goal – the park's renovation – and using their presence to put pressure on the public officials invited to give a positive answer to their requests. The event gathered around 100 persons - children, parents and grandparents - all endorsers of the park's modernization. Pressured by the audience, the public official attending the gathering – the deputy director of ADPU - gave positive answers to 80% of the people's requests.

Fearing that promises will remain unaccomplished, the group had a face to face meeting with the same deputy director following the public event in order to further develop the park's modernizing plan. The meeting ended with a report signed by the deputy director, which included promises made during the public event and the commitment to give an official written response about the modernization of the park in December 2012. The expected answer didn't come and gave the group no alternative but to continue to pressure public officials by email and phone in order for promises made in the Fall to come true. In January, the deputy director came with an answer, after receiving more calls from the group: technically, the park would be rehabilitated; it was just a matter of finances, and the way they will allocate money for the park in the local budget for 2012. The focus of the group moved from negotiating the list of demands, to making sure the park will be included on the 2012 local budget.

Grasping the Opportunities

In January 2012, the local budget draft was published on the City Hall's website. Anxious that the budget did not explicitly provide funds for the modernization of the Istru Park, Callatis group joined forces with another group in the district - Favorit Initiative – and with CeRe and called for a public debate on the local budget. At first, the City Hall refused to organize it, even though it was an illegal decision to make, and approved the local budget as it was initially presented. In February, as the groups prepared to attack this latter decision, the City Hall publicized an amended budget proposal. Once again, the groups with CeRe's help grasped the opportunity and asked for a public debate. This time, the City Hall accepted to hold a meeting on the 28th of February. The public debate organized by the City Hall was a surprise to both leaders and organizers. Well prepared for a thorough discussion on the budget, the citizen groups remained vulnerable in front of the Mayor's strategy that invited his own sympathizers at the debate to talk about lots of different issues that were not on the meeting's agenda. Moreover, the Mayor tried to associate the groups with the opposition parties, implying from time to time their cooperation, a strategy that agitated his sympathizers against the groups.

Despite the aggressive reaction of the Mayor in office, Callatis snatched the promise that the City Hall would allocate 290 000 RON, approximately 65 000 euros, for the modernization of the park and that the working would start on the 1st of April 2012.

A Bitter Success

Two more intense negotiation meetings with the Director of the public space administration followed the public debate. Finally, on April 8th, the actual reconstruction work in the park began, and the group saw the culmination of their long term commitment and effort. They have won the issue and convinced public authorities to take their modernization plan into account. Most requests of the initiative group were implemented and after 9 months, residents of the area benefit from a refurbished playground, a soccer and basketball field, and green space improvements. Nevertheless, the battle left scares. The manipulation, aggressive reactions and implied threats from the Mayor and other officials in the City Hall discouraged and sometimes divided the group's members throughout the campaign. The reaction of the decision-makers was not the only obstacle the group had to face. Conflicts in the community arose about the way the park should look like and be equipped with. Managing the disagreements stole a lot of the group's energy that felt burned out after the campaign. However, two months afterwards, the remaining members of the group are feeling ready to go on and organize a public event to celebrate the park's modernization, grasp new issues for action and more importantly find new people that are willing to get involved on their side.

Community Organizing in Slovakia

Community organizing was introduced to Slovakia in 1994 when the National Democratic Institute (NDI – an American institute helping democratic transition) launched an initial project in Trencin where NGOs came together to solve several local problems. Two years later, a second phase of the work was introduced with Slovaks being hired and trained to be organizers. This work continued for three years and resulted in organizing work started in three cities and eventually expanded to three others. Numerous groups began listening processes, launched campaigns and won victories across the country. The Center for Community Organizing was formed in 1999.

The work continued to grow including the formation of a separate country-wide citizens' organization, Citizens in Action. CCO worked in approximately ten different cities and villages in Slovakia in the first eight years. But due to lack of funding, CCO currently limits its work to Zvolen and Banska Bystrica.

The Center for Community Organizing (CCO) was one of the founding members of ECON. CCO has helped a number of other countries in the region to start up the work of organizing through training and consultation. CCO continues to strive to not only solve problems in our neighbourhoods but also to build long-term citizen organizations. Despite the strong resistance to building these types of organizations, CCO is learning how to do this better and progress continues to be made in addressing this.

Banska Bystrica, Radvan – Shell campaign – Winning against all Odds

The Radvan neighbourhood is a Socialist constructed neighbourhood in the southern side of Banska Bystrica which was built in the early 1960's. There are approximately 10,000 inhabitants living there. In the spring of 2000, several citizens learned about plans to build a new gas station in the pedestrian center of the neighbourhood. They wanted to prevent the gas station from being built in this location. They approached the Center for Community Organizing for help in organizing a campaign. They had been excluded from participating in the planning and understood that they needed an approach that required action.

A group got formed to block the gas station from being built in the pedestrian center of the neighbourhood. The initial three activists who approached the Center for Community Organizing had learned about this approach from seeing several other community groups in Banska Bystrica win campaigns in their communities and the activists realized that something like this would be needed to successfully oppose the proposed construction. One-on-one interviews were used in the work after the initial leadership group had formed and several actions had taken place.

There were a series of actions that took place over the course of the two and a half years (2000 – 2003). The main actions included:

- ◆ Initial petition was delivered to City Council. No one would disclose who the gas company was but the group knew who the local investors were (this took place before the „Freedom of Information Law" was in place).

- Public rally on the site where the gas station was to be built which was held the day before crucial vote by City Council related to approving the project. The Mayor attended the rally and met privately with leaders at the end of the rally to clarify the process the following day. A delegation of leaders went, but found that City Council was in recess and that the vote had already been taken in favour of the project.

- Preparing and displaying large banner across two balconies, very visible in the pedestrian center where the gas station was to be built. The banner reported how the elected representatives from that neighbourhood had voted on the issue regarding approval of the project.

- Public meeting with the Mayor to attempt to get him to agree to not approve the proposed project. The group realized they were not likely to be successful at this meeting but they wanted to let the Mayor know that they were serious and to continue to put public pressure on him to take citizens concerns into consideration.

- There were a series of actions related to attending required public hearings related to the development project. Authorities knew that many citizens wanted to attend the hearing and oppose the project. They attempted to manipulate the process and to prevent citizens from being able to attend. Their manipulative actions precipitated the filing of a law suit with the Constitutional Court. This action became a critical aspect of the campaign as both the local

investors and Shell Oil had to account for the fact that there was a pending legal action in front of the Constitutional Court and thus significantly slowed down the project.

- After a year and a half, citizens finally learned that it was Shell Oil who planned to locate a gas station at this site. The leaders invited the Director of Shell Slovakia, to join them for a discussion about the project. He agreed and promised to take their concerns seriously. However from that time, he proceeded to ignore all letters, calls and e-mails related to the project.

- Several months following the meeting with the Director of Shell, the citizens initiative joined with five other citizen initiatives from around the country and prepared an initial action of holding a protest in front of Shell headquarters in Bratislava two weeks after the joint meeting. A month later, protests were organized in front of Shell stations in five different cities in Slovakia including Banska Bystrica. Again, the public messages were directed to Shell Director.

- The Mayor set up a meeting with all parties to see if an alternative site could be found for the gas station. The local investors, Shell and representatives of the Radvan initiative were invited. Unfortunately, Shell and the investors decided a month later to not accept any of the alternative sites offered by the city.

- The leaders agreed to conduct a two hour blockade on a Friday afternoon which was one of their busiest times. The group also used this event to launch a boycott of Shell. They asked people to sign forms that they would refuse to buy Shell gas and other products until they agreed to not build the station in Radvan.

- Members of the Central and Eastern European Citizens Network also agreed to join the boycott. They encouraged their members to boycott and joined in sending letters to the European Shell headquarters in London.

- Another rally was held in front of Shell headquarters in Bratislava to "celebrate" the Name Day of the Shell Director. Thirty people from across Slovakia went with party hats and noise makers along with the first 1000 boycott forms.

Within two months of the Name Day party, Shell announced their decision to drop their plans to construct the station in Radvan. The gas station was not built. Nearly nine months after Shell announced their decision to stop the construction plans, the Constitutional Court finally heard the citizens' complaint. The court agreed that the public hearing process had been manipulated. It helped to set a new legal precedent for public hearings in Slovakia. Within a few months of the victory, another smaller issue related to a proposed change in this public area was introduced. The City approached the citizen initiative to invite them to sit down and negotiate what would be done with this new project. The system had changed.

Many challenges were encountered in this campaign, including the main leaders being threatened with the loss of their jobs. The headline after the blockade was "citizens terrorize" gas station. Activists were constantly publically criticized for blocking development in the city. The group held together and supported their members who were threatened and criticized.

The campaign was unique, however, in several ways. It started with a crisis as opposed to a listening process. It lasted more than two-and-a-half years. The campaign was attempting to influence a business as well as government. There was the need for constant action. The evaluation that followed the campaign was that the "power" of the group came more from the constant annoyance rather than masses of people. Finally, the campaign required the support of groups across Slovakia and then in the CEE region to have enough power.

Community Organizing in the Republic of Moldova

Community organizing has been growing and winning victories in southern Moldova since 2007. Plans are underway to expand community organizing in other parts of the country in coming years.

Cantemir and Cahul, Moldova – from Scepticism and Threats to Hope and Victories

Inspired by community organizing trainings in Romania and Paris, a Moldovan activist accepted the challenge of doing community organizing in her town of Cantemir. In 2007, she did 70 face-to-face visits with residents, listening for concerns and visions they held for their town of 5,000 residents. Their first effort was a self-help project, raising money and volunteering to repaint and renovate their children's' elementary school cafeteria. "I first needed to give the volunteers an experience of working together for the common good, an experience they often did not have during previous times," stated the community organizer.

Following this first success, the community organizer trained 11 volunteers to conduct 210 additional face-to-face visits. In January, 2009 fifty persons who had been visited attended an assembly in which they voted to address the problem of garbage collection for residents in high rise apartment buildings. No adequate containers for garbage existed and collections were infrequent,

creating serious health risks and a lack of beauty in the neighbourhoods. Following a few months of research, their newly formed community organization entitled "Association of Citizens with Initiative" began meeting with the Mayor, town council, and town-contracted private garbage company. While the citizens negotiated in good faith and their demands were reasonable, tensions grew with public officials, leading the council members to accuse the organizer and volunteers of being "terrorists". But the Association persisted, eventually winning new fenced-in garbage containers and more regular garbage pick-ups.

In early 2011, the Association of Citizens with Initiatives were awarded a grant from the Open Society/Soros Moldova Foundation for an eight-month campaign to continue the community organizing in Cantemir and to expand to three surrounding villages. The community organizer and an assistant helped citizens to form initiative groups of four residents in each of the three new villages who then conducted dozens of face-to-face visits to identify priority issues. In December, 2012 a conference was held with 77 persons from the four villages and guest from other villages. Each group reported on their issue successes – the renovation of a sport complex for young people, the purchase of needed medical equipment for the village hospital, the renovation of a main bus stop, and the building of a children's playground. In all cases, the volunteers had used community organizing strategies to lobby and pressure their local village governments to invest resources, as well as, conducted their own fundraising campaigns to augment government funding. And a remarkable thing occurred during a

closing question and answer period of this December conference. After being accused by the Cantemir town council two years previously of being "terrorists" because residents had become active, a Mayor from a new village asked at the December conference, "When will you come to my village to help organize our residents? We need active citizens in our village!"

Another person who attended the community organizing trainings in Romania and Paris came from the CONTACT organization in Cahul, Moldova. In late 2010, she was approached by a Cahul resident who told of a major problem in his neighbourhood of three high-rise apartment buildings and day-care center. A field in the middle of the neighbourhood which had been previously promised by the city to be developed as a park was now being sold to a developer who wanted to build a high-rise office building and disco on its ground floor. Residents felt betrayed and angry, but were scared to act. The resident became a volunteer community organizing, visiting residents, building trust and respect, and brought them together for common action. Their research revealed that the field had been sold illegally to the developer. On a Saturday morning in the Spring of 2011, over 200 residents marched to city hall to oppose the sale. Police approached to break up the rally outside the city hall, but eventually backed off when they learned why the residents were there. "Two years ago, this type of rally would have never occurred in Cahul. People were too scared. But now, people are beginning to stand up for their rights," stated the organizer. Following the march, rally, and much media coverage, the sale was stopped. The field was preserved and with the help of fundraising and volunteer efforts of the residents, playground equipment and picnic pavilions are being installed.

Evaluation and Next Steps for Community Organizing in Moldova

Community organizing can occur in a "strong market" or a "weak market" environment. This means that in some cities and villages, governmental and other resources exist but are not fairly distributed, in which case the demands of community organizations revolve around the fair distribution of services and improvements. But in a "weak market" environment, local city or village governments are lacking the resources to help residents solve their problems and achieve their visions. This is the case in Cantemir and Cahul, Moldova. This has had two main consequences for the community organizing by the Association of Citizens with Initiative and CONTACT. First, they have initially turned to the government for help, but then have had to also ask residents to share their resources to make needed improvements. Secondly, the Association and CONTACT recognize that for significant change to occur in their villages and throughout Moldova, community organizing needs to expand and connect with each other to demand reforms at the regional and national level. The Association of Citizens with Initiative and CONTACT are currently building relationships with funders and others to help develop a long-term plan for the expansion of community organizing to other villages and cities, including the creation of a "Moldovan Center for Community Organizing" which can provide training, consulting, and help unite local efforts around regional and national issue campaigns.

Residents and public authorities in Cantemir and Cahul have moved during the past four years with community organizing from scepticism and threats against them, to hope and victories. And they have a vision for the future of building sufficient citizen power to be able to win victories at a regional, national, as well as, local level.

Community Organizing in Poland

Community organizing methods were used by anticommunist opposition in the 1970's and 1980's. The movement, from few persons at the beginning evolved step-by-step into a trade union which organized a few millions of people. It had direct influence on changing the political system in Poland.

A characteristic of Polish society is that inhabitants organize and unite in times of crisis and civil unrest. In the situation of peace and stability people do not feel community spirit and have the mindset of only organizing their personal life and the increase of their material goods. The response to the atomization of individuals can be community organizing, which shows people how to cooperate and makes them more active in working for the common well-being. The Bona Fides Association is the first non-profit organization in Poland which has started to work with a local community using this method.

Katowice – Solving a Common Neighborhood Problem: Lack of Parking

Katowice is a city in Silesia in southern Poland. It is the central district of the Upper Silesian Metropolis. In Katowice live almost 300,000 habitants. It is the center of science, culture, industry, business and transportation, but also is a large coal and steel center.

The Bona Fides Association is an independent non-profit and politically unaffiliated non-governmental organization whose main projects aim to increase the quality and transparency of the local public life, along with the reinforcement of the civic participation in making important decisions regarding the city. The Bona Fides Association started to implement a community organizing project in June 2011.

Choosing the Neighbourhood

In the course of the first month, the community organizer chose a place, where she wanted to start a community organizing process. In Katowice there are many centers of local activity in which people use methods of social work, but the organizer wanted to start organizing in a district where there were no institutions doing such activities. One of the oldest districts of Katowice – Bogucice – was chosen. People who live there worked in the now closed coal mines and other occupations. It's a neglected district where one can see an old part from the 19th century and some new housing estates. When the organizer started, she talked with people to get to know them and the areas of potential future activities. She did an initial analysis and decided to work with the community of small, green housing estate by the name of Franciszek Ścigała. She made this decision, because she learned about the community's attempt to solve local problems. It was a sign that people living there wanted to do something together.

A Difficult Start

At the beginning of her work, the community organizer was looking for contacts to well-known people from this area, but this proved unsuccessful. Talking to people in a park and in the streets also was not effective. People were distrustfully, did not want to meet, and did not want to give their addresses and phone numbers.

So the organizer decided to go door-knocking accompanied by another Bona Fides worker or volunteer. The listening process took three months. During this time, 80 inhabitants of Bogucice were visited and this helped attract a group of people and some local leaders.

In October, 2011 the organizer started to work with the leaders identified. The organizer and leaders arranged the first meeting which took place in November with inhabitants of Bogucice. 25 people were invited to this meeting but only 7 came. It was not a big success because of the low attendance, but the leaders handled it very well. During the meeting they debated about the name of our the group and discussed problems that the organizer had learned about earlier in the listening process. Because few people attended the meeting, there was also a discussion about how to attract new members. The leaders decided to inform their neighbours and friends, as well as, post up invitations for the next meeting in apartment building staircases.

Even though the attendance was much higher - 30 people attended the meeting in December - new challenges arose - some of the people, living in a different part of Katowice, expected the organizer and leaders to solve their problems. When it was clarified that the residents will take problems into their own hands, some of the participants left the meeting. At the beginning it was a little chaotic and it was very difficult to control the group. Not all of the goals were achieved – the name of the group was not decided nor were tasks distributed. The group also did not decide which problem to solve. But it was a very good exercise for the leaders and an important lesson for the future.

Since November, 2011 the inhabitants' meetings have been taking place regularly and are getting better and better. Leaders are becoming professionals in this field. For a few months the group had difficulties choosing a winnable issue. The group dispersed its energy and ideas in lots of directions that proved to be deadlocks, from cash dispensers, and dog's faeces, to an area of former allotments. Leaders started being frustrated by the lack of action.

Finally the group picked the issue that Katowice's Mayor had not visited Bogucice for a long time. The group decided to arrange a meeting with him and sent an invitation to the City Hall. A few days later the Mayor of Katowice accepted the invitation, but it turned out that it was not the only invitation he accepted – some other local organizations and institutions joined the meeting. The group felt that they claimed our invitation to their credit. Nevertheless, the meeting turned out to be important because the group achieved one of its goal – they decided to promote their new name – "Neighbourly Initiative" or „Nasze Osiedle Ścigały" in Polish.

Choosing and Working on the Parking Issue

At the meeting in March, 2012 the group chose a problem to work on – the lack of parking spaces near the housing estate. They investigated this matter and learned how it could be changed. The group chose a place where a parking lot could be built and also learned that the City Hall does not have plans related to it. The group decided to act. They gathered arguments in favour of their proposal and checked:

- how much parking space the inhabitants of the Ścigały estate need (how many cars are parked in general and how many of them are parked on the street);
- if inhabitants want new places to park;
- how many garages have been knocked down recently;
- how big is the area chosen by us and if in this place a parking lot can be built;
- how many parking lots have been built in Katowice in the last 2 years;
- how much money does Katowice City Hall allocate to such aims?

First the group promoted the idea of more parking spaces in the neighborhood. They organized an event right on the place where they wanted to have the parking lot. The volunteers worked hard, crafting colored cars from cardboard and cutting out photos from newspapers and putting them on 'our future car park'. At the same time they sent a letter to the Mayor of Katowice and requested a meeting in his office in June. During the event the group collected signatures on a support list for the idea.

They informed the inhabitants of the Ścigały estate and the media about the event. This event was a big success. In 2 hours the volunteers collected over 100 signatures and people had a really positive attitude. The event was held on Saturday and no later than Monday the volunteers got information from the City Hall that the Mayor had accepted their invitation and would meet them in the Ścigały estate the same week!

A Quick Victory

When the volunteers and Mayor met and walked through the Bogucice neighborhood, they touched upon lots of topics, but for the group the most important one was that of the parking lot. Representatives of the group showed the place where they wanted to have the parking lot and gave really strong arguments in support of their idea. The group was sure that such decisions could not be made without prior consulting with experts, so they asked for such a meeting. After the conversation with the Mayor, he talked with employees/experts from his office and a few minutes later came back to the volunteers, unexpectedly promising to adapt the area chosen by the group for a parking lot, to be built by August 2012! Immediately the group informed the inhabitants of Bogucice and the media about the promise made by the Mayor. The group had no time to celebrate the promise because the parking lot construction began in early June and finished on June 21st! The group achieved its goal in less time than expected!

Conclusion and Next Steps

The group of residents are wondering how they managed to achieve their goal in such a short time. They noticed that in Poland people struggle for their needs and rights in a different way than they did – often they struggle for support first and then when they do not receive any response from the authorities they decide to look for this support among citizens – for example, they collect signatures. Officials are not used to the way of dealing with problems when people first work on the problems themselves and then ask the officials to solve them. Very important in this case was also the support of the Bona Fides Association, because Bona Fides is well-known by the local government as a watchdog organization that changed a lot the city of Katowice through their persistence, sometimes in spite of negative reactions from the local government.

Now that the parking lot is done, the residents group is planning to organize a big event by the name of 'a Parking Lot Day'. The residents group want to celebrate this first and so important success with the whole community! They are also planning a Fall, 2012 training that will lead to a next listening process, research, and problem solving in the neighborhood.

Community Organizing in Hungary

Looking back into the history of Hungary we do not find too many traces of organizing. The emergence of the workers' movement at the end of the 19th century and the first trade unions later on were the most important scenes for bringing people together in fighting for changes and improvement in their lives. During 40 years of socialist realm – similarly to other Eastern European countries – the whole society and economy were built on the fetishism of some kind of community approach. People were forced into cooperatives, they were obliged to do voluntary work with their colleagues on "communist Saturdays", and several other examples of "forced communities" could be listed here. Probably our history is one important reason of the very strong individualism and resistance against involvement in different types of groups and communities now. Compared with Western European countries or with the US, the rate of people holding membership in civil society organizations, church groups, or other forms of organized society is pretty low here.

Another aspect to be taken into account is that despite the very large number of civil society organizations in Hungary there is a lack of organizations with a real base of organized people. When it comes to organizations dealing with social issues the vast majority of them are service providers. Many of them are depending on service contracts with the local governments, and the fact that a very high proportion of organizations' income is coming from the state – which makes any advocacy work and confrontation with the government very difficult – is a general problem in our country.

1. Budapest - Giving Power to Those Lacking It the Most: Empowering People Living in Poverty through Community Organizing

Empowerment of the Poor – Why Organizing?

After several years of experiences with advocacy work for poor people, The Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network realized that in order to create more power among them and to be more credible we have to systematically organize our constituencies. While until 2010 the governments were more or less open to getting engaged in dialogue with civil society, the recent decision making system is totally closed. Asking poor people about their problems and needs and channelling their demands into the debates through advocates is not enough and not working any more. As the recent government understands only the language of power we have to show that we have it. In order to be able to mobilize thousands of people in poverty in the future we have started organizing first small groups from them.

The Hungarian Anti Poverty Network was set up as an informal cooperation of civil society organizations working for a more inclusive society and poverty reduction in Hungary in 2004. The Network has 150 member organizations now and is a member of the European Anti-Poverty Network. The Network has quite a bit of experience in working with poor people. We have organized trainings, meetings, seminars for them in order to improve their skills, make them able to get their voices heard and strengthen their participation in the Network and in the whole society. As a result of six years of work in this field we have a quite stable network of activist living in poverty

all over the country. They are many times individuals from different cities, so we would never say we have a broad base, but we have a basis to build on and consider organizing at national level.

Choosing a Problem

As poverty is a very broad and complex topic it is simply impossible to approach and involve all the poor and deal with all the problems at the same time. That is why we decided to pick up one problem and start doing outreach and organizing among people who are affected by it. In order to make sure our member organizations will get involved in the organizing process and in our future campaign we wanted to choose a topic which is considered to be important by them. As a result of couple of interviews and a so called campaign meeting with them we ended up with the problem of unemployment and specifically the recent system of public work.

To cut a long story short: unemployed people who are entitled to social assistance have to do public work otherwise they lose their benefit. Public work usually means low quality jobs (e.g. cleaning the street) for 3-6 months with bad working conditions and for a salary much lower than the official minimum wage. Studies have clearly showed that public work is not a pathway to real employment and the activities people have to do are often meaningless (e.g. they cut the grass by hand while it could be done easily and more quickly with a machine). Approximately 200 thousand people are involved into the system annually.

How We Started Community Organizing?

After identifying the topic we were faced with couple of questions like where and how we can reach people doing public work; what kind of resources can we involve; who might be our allies and who are our enemies to keep our eyes on them? We are still in the outreach and listening process, so we do not have all the answers, but some.

Where?

Public workers are sent by the employment office to work at different venues for different institutions and organizations. In a huge city like Budapest they get a wide variety of tasks: some of them (with university degrees) do assistant jobs at schools or for the local municipality while those with lower education are involved in public sanitation. It means that there are groups of them – probably the ones in the most disadvantaged situation – which are available in public areas while others cannot be contacted this way.

So the way how we started, after identifying three districts of Budapest, where we work in the first phase of our organizing process, is by looking for public places where public workers can be accessed. In order to find the way to the other groups, we contacted the employment offices and asked for information on the institutions and organizations where public workers are employed. After getting these lists we will contact them and ask for providing opportunity for meeting people working for them.

How?

We made the first pilot interviews with people who were gathered together by the local municipality for us. The way how we met them was very easy and comfortable for us, but might be frustrating for them. They were selected by municipality workers, they were ordered to come to the interview and our organizer met them in the building of the local municipality. Though these circumstances, two out of five people seemed to be interested to get involved in an organized group.

When thinking about contacting people doing public work in the streets we realized that it might be easier if we have something in our hand what we can deliver to people. That is why we made a very simple leaflet – mentioning some problems with public work and the contacts of our organizer.

With whom?

As there is only one community organizer working for the Network, we always looked for ways of involving other people as volunteers into the process. So far there are two main groups of people volunteering for us in this process. The first group comes from our activists living in poverty in the countryside who are interested in learning about organizing and taking part in spreading the process outside of Budapest. The second group consists of people involved in a learning circle on community organizing; many of them took part in a 6-week exchange visit on organizing in the US. The learning circle was set up by people who are dedicated either to doing organizing in practice or promoting it

and working on creating its professional background (by trainings and supervision, etc.) in Hungary beginning a year ago.

Our organizer and the volunteers meet regularly to discuss on the methods to be used and to plan the actual activities to be done. We are convinced that this way of working is not only important because it multiplies our resources but because it also contributes to developing possible future community organizers.

What's Next?

As the next major steps in our organizing process we plan to have the first community meeting where we can work on deepening our personal relationships with people, building the group and start the issue identification process. After identifying the issue(s) to work on we can start developing the strategy of the first joint campaign.

In line with the basic principles of community organizing we will always focus on continuous development of our possible leaders. As an important part of this development process we will provide a basic training on power relations, basics of organizing, outreach and involvement.

After having approached only couple of people it might seem to be a huge challenge to build sustainable groups and organizations of people in poverty, but we are convinced that with a systematic work we will be able to organize hundreds or even thousands of poor people in Hungary.

2. Budapest – The City is for All – Organizing the Homeless

The City is for All (A Város Mindenkié) was founded in August 2009 in Budapest, Hungary by homeless and formerly homeless activists and their allies who fight for a society based on equality and justice. The group aims to create an opportunity for homeless people to stand up for their dignity and fight for the right to housing. The City is for All organizes campaigns and actions to defend homeless people's rights, to advocate for their interests, and to change the social perception of homelessness.

Even though homeless people play a leading role in all the group's activities, having a mixed (homeless/ex-homeless/housed) membership is something that makes the group not fit into the common community organizing perspective. Since every active member counts as an activist, there are no designated organizers, which make the different parts of organizing roles wander between members. But there are other features related to community organizing that make this group worth mentioning:

- ◆ the grassroots democratic approach;
- ◆ the thorough strategic planning;
- ◆ the outreach and recruitment methods;
- ◆ the massive empowerment of marginalized persons directly affected by the certain social problem;

- ◆ the confrontational direct action approach;
- ◆ the aim to build a sustainable organization and a housing movement

all remind oneself of community organizing methods, even though the group got to know the approach by practice.

There might be some debate about whether this group should be counted as an organization based on community organizing principles, but one must admit the fact that the members found out themselves most of the standards and rules which connects their group structure and operations to community organizing.

CONCLUSIONS

The nine case studies that are included in this Handbook offer only a glimpse at the successes, challenges and questions raised by citizens' involvement in local decision-making through community organizing. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn in regards to the impact community organizing has on citizens, communities, and local governments' transparency and accountability, as well as, the common challenges and obstacles faced while trying to implement community organizing in Europe, especially in the Central and Eastern European region.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TRANSFORMS PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

1. Community Organizing Brings Concrete Improvements in People's Lives

The positive changes that community organizing brings, and that have been underlined throughout this Handbook, are related first of all to the tangible results of people's involvement in public decisions that shape their cities/neighbourhoods/villages. Better infrastructure and green spaces, the preservation of an old city center, more environmentally-friendly garbage collection are but a few of the achievements of the citizens' groups presented in this Handbook. Most of the issues solved as a result of community organizing processes were on the top of the list of people's priorities and needs, and people's contribution to finding the best solution to the problem was a key factor in determining the success.

2. Community Organizing Empowers Citizens to Make Use of Their Existent Rights but also to Claim New Spaces of Participation

Community organizing proves to be an effective way to involve people that normally are outside the decision-making process and to give them voice in shaping their own lives – empowering people is thus a complex and long term process which entails several aspects from building their capacities and skills, giving them knowledge about their rights as citizens, to building up their motivation and confidence to step out in the public space and demand changes. After living many years in totalitarian regimes with their voices being suppressed, people developed a sort of inertia and disaffection. The first aim of community organizers in this type of context was to make citizens recover a sense of their capacity and right to act. Once they grasped this again and they were willing and able to voice their problems, visions, and concerns citizens began to use the institutional and legal framework available to participate in the public decision making. As demonstrated in the case studies, the first steps people were willing to make were related to petitioning, requests for public debates and public hearings with elected officials, all institutionalized and legal mechanisms. Most of the times though, these strategies proved to be inefficient and people realized they need to move

a step forward. Through community organizing, informal groups of citizens have started using more upfront strategies – protests, public events, accountability sessions, boycotts, media pressure – and most importantly building power – mobilizing their neighbours and other actors in the community to support the cause.

3. Organized Citizens, through Their Involvement in Decision-Making, Challenge the Way Public Authorities and Institutions Function, Their Culture and Practices

Few of the case studies included in this Handbook have presented examples where public authorities reacted quickly and positively to people's demands. The Polish examples from Katowice or the Callatis group first success in Bucharest, Romania seem to be exceptions rather than the rule. In most cases, citizens involvement is neither well received nor encouraged. On the contrary, in examples from Moldova, Slovakia, and Romania there were aggressive reactions, threats, manipulation from elected officials, all to discourage citizens to demand the changes they wanted and the information they were entitled to know. People's persistence though helps change the way public institutions function and elected officials perceive themselves. Willingly or pressured, they become more aware of the fact they are accountable to those who elected them, and they start taking into account peoples' needs and desires. The battle is not an easy one as lots of public decision-makers are not used to this kind of pressure and their reactions range from ignoring and postponing people's requests to aggressive reactions, accusations and threats aiming at discouraging people, dividing the groups, or attempting to ruin their credibility.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING - COMMON CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

1. Building Multi-Issue Groups Committed to Long Term Involvement

Most of the time, people react and mobilize themselves and others in crisis situations to solve stringent problems that cannot be postponed any longer. Once the problem is solved, people tend to withdraw from the public space and concentrate on their personal sphere of interests. This type of ad-hoc engagement is a lot more present than the long-term and proactive participation in the community life. In this context, gathering people around less stringent and urgent problems proves to be much harder. It requires a sense of community and a proactive attitude to improving the city/neighbourhood/village while the majority of people tend to be reactive or expect others (their neighbours, the public authorities etc.) to notice and solve whatever issue the community encounters.

Besides the reactive or expectative approach, a wide range of other attitudes, beliefs and feelings explain why people don't get involved in community matters: apathy, disaffection, mistrust in public institutions and authorities and/or in their neighbours, scepticism about their own capacity to determine changes, fear to be exposed/to speak up in the public arena and so on. Lots of people

are rooted in the communist legacies and in the lengthy, difficult and most of the times disappointing transitions to market economies and democracies of post-communist societies since the 1990s. In addition there is the result of a poor political and civic culture, contributed to by an underdeveloped educational system. In these societies, the changes people produce through their involvement in decision-making processes serve as a model and hopefully a trigger for others to participate.

2. Sustainability – Finding Resources for Community Organizing

Given all of the above mentioned challenges, there is an acute need to invest in engaging more citizens in the decisions that affect their lives, and in processes that give them a sense of power in the relationship with local governments. The investment in building powerful citizens' groups needs to be a long-term commitment in order to impact our societies. As the case studies have showed, community organizing is a complex and long-term approach that responds to several needs and deficits of our democracies and that requires the permanent involvement of trained and professional staff. The community organizer's role in building citizens' groups and in helping them strategize and run successful campaigns for their causes is crucial. Without organizers gathering and encouraging people to act in a strategic and long-term way, there will only be sporadic, reactive, and ad-hoc civic engagement that is limited or often ends in failure.

Unfortunately, the organizations that have initiated community organizing processes struggle to find resources to carry on. While in the USA lots of foundations and donors have provided seed funding to support the building of community organizations, Europe is currently lacking the support and resources for long term citizen participation strategies like community organizing. Hopefully, foundations, corporations, private individuals, and other donors will decide to invest more in building powerful citizens groups able to produce positive changes in their communities and hold accountable public institutions.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

BOOKS

- "Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists", Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, Steve Max, The Forum Press, 2010;

- "Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals", Saul Alinsky, Vintage Books Edition, 1971;

- „Creative Community Organizing: a Guide for Rabble-Rousers, Activists and Quiet Lovers of Justice", Si Kahn, Berrett- Koehler Publishers, 2010;

- „Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy", Rinku Sen, Publisher: Jossey-Bass; 1 edition (March 14, 2003);

- „Dynamics of Organizing: Building Power by Developing the Human Spirit", Shel Trapp, satrapp@earthlink.net, 2007;

- „We Make Change: Community Organizers Talk about What They Do – and Why", Kristin Layng Szakos, Joe Szakos, Vanderbilt University Press, 2007;

- "Lessons from the Field: Organizing in Rural Communities", Joe Szakos and Kristin Layng Szakos, Social Policy Magazine, 2008.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- comm-org.wisc.edu — Comm-Org: The Online Conference on Community Organizing – contains hundreds of articles and resources about community organizing;

- neworganizing.com — The New Organizing Institute – contains training materials, projects, blogs, and numerous other resources concerning community organizing;

- comm-org.wisc.edu/?q=node/10 — A list of online training manuals;

- neworganizing.com/project/toolbox — An Organizer's Toolbox including numerous training videos and outlines;

- toolsforradicaldemocracy.com — Fragments from Joan Minieri and Paul Getsos book — Tools for Radical Democracy: How to Organize for Power in Your Community (Jossey-Bass / Kim Klein's Chardon Press).

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE RESOURCES

Community Organizing Training Packet in Polish

- http://sllgo.pl/files/organizowanie_spolecznosciowe_kjr1.pdf — Training Materials of Dave Beckwith.

Resources in German

- Forum Community Organizing, e.V.: www.fo-co.info includes literature list;
- Penta, Leo (Hrsg.) (2007). Community Organizing. Menschen verändern ihre Stadt. Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung;
- Szynka, Peter (2005). Theoretische und empirische Grundlagen des Community Organizing bei Saul D. Alinsky (1909-1972) – Eine Rekonstruktion. Bremen: Akademie für Arbeit und Politik der Universität Bremen.

Resources in Romanian

- The Resource Center for Public Participation website — www.ce-re.ro/programul-de-organizare or www.ce-re.ro/ENG/back-to-the-grassroots
- A brochure presenting 3 community organizing case studies from Bucharest and theoretical parts about community organizing — www.ce-re.ro/upload/catalog_OC_maimic.pdf

Resources in Hungarian

- Website of the learning circle on community organizing: kozossegszervezes.wordpress.com
- Website of City is for All: avarosmindenkie.blog.hu

Resources in Slovak

- Website of Center for Community Organizing — www.cko.sk

LINKS TO A SAMPLING OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS

European Community Organizing Network (ECON)

- ECON's Facebook Page can be found at: http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/European-Community-Organizing-Network-ECON/119744504743884;

- ECON is currently constructing a new website. When completed, the website will contain training materials, articles about CO Projects in Europe, and other resources.

USA Networks

- npa-us.org — National Peoples Action, Chicago, Illinois;

- www.ctwo.org — The Center for Third World Organizing, Oakland, California;

- www.thedartcenter.org/learn-about-dart — The Direct Action Training and Resource Center, Miami, Florida;

- www.gamaliel.org — The Gamaliel Foundation, Chicago, Illinois;

- www.industrialareasfoundation.org/index.html — The Industrial Areas Foundation, Chicago, Illinois;

- www.piconetwork.org — PICO National Network, Oakland, California;

- www.communitychange.org — Center for Community Change, Washington, DC.

USA Organizations

- www.cvhaction.org — Community Voices Heard, New York, New York;

- www.virginia-organizing.org — Virginia Organizing, Charlottesville, Virginia;

- www.mvorganizing.org — Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative, Youngstown, Ohio;

- tubmanorganizing.org — Harriet Tubman Center, Detroit, Michigan;

- www.lsna.net/index.html — Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Chicago, Illinois;

- www.chicagohomeless.org — Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Chicago, Illinois;

- www.lakeviewaction.org — Lakeview Action Coalition, Chicago, Illinois;

- www.unitednorth.org — United North, Toledo, Ohio;

- www.vocal-ny.org — Voices Of Community Advocates & Leaders (VOCAL) New York;

- www.povertyinitiative.org — Poverty Initiative, New York.

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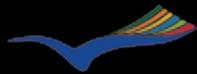
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