
STRUCTURAL FUNDS AND PARTNERSHIP

An analysis of the partnership of public administration with non-governmental non-profit organizations in Central and Eastern Europe.



SFTEAM

EDITOR: Mgr. Pavla Oriniaková, Ph.D.

This publication was financed by the International Visegrad Fund and co-financed by the Department of European Affairs of The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic and by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This publication stems mainly from knowledge of non-profit organizations in Central and Eastern European countries. It was created with an aim to discover how the non-profit organizations of Central and Eastern Europe participate in preparation and implement operational programmes. The SFteam (Sustainable Future Team) has followed these issues for a long time. The SFteam is the network of non-profit organizations of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. I would hereby like to express my thanks to our partners, and also give thanks for the data, which has helped me to compile this publication.

SFteam's mission is supportive of processes, which lead to utilization of structural funds with the aim to maintain sustainable development. We are convinced that the involvement of non-profit organizations in decision-making and partnership is the essential element for such processes.

However, we know that the partnership between public administration and non-profit sector of structural funds has only a short history and weak political support in our countries. We are interested to find out whether significant positive activities appear in some of the Central and Eastern European countries. We are interested in how the partnerships are created and which status the non-profit sector has in those partnerships. We want to apply our knowledge in the negotiations, which would lead into enforcement of a partnership principle in Central and Eastern Europe.

Prague 23th December 2008

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METHODOLOGY

SFteam's partner organizations in Central and Eastern Europe (in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) participated in the research.

In first stage we created methodical techniques, which we then implemented in all countries.

We have prepared methodical sheets and questionnaires for data-gathering. There were two types of questionnaires. They were aimed at non-profit organizations and at representation of non-profit organizations in monitoring committees of operational programmes. Further questionnaires and letters for representatives of national decision-makers were created. In Hungary, mainly the people working in the governmental field as well as the participants of the non-profit society were asked – they helped us with our work personally. So it can be supposed that they can evaluate the topic comprehensively.

Questions for desk research were prepared. Desk research was carried out by partners in all countries.

Partners in almost of countries have sent questionnaires in each country to c. 300 non-profit organizations, to 10 representatives of authorities, and to 10 representatives of NGOs in monitoring committees. The rate of return was very low, only 10% came back.

We processed and analysed the results of surveys and questionnaires. These results were then used for formulation of conclusions and for illustration of good and poor examples.

The Chapter 6 was added to results of our survey to illustrate benefits of concrete NGOs partnership projects. The projects described in this chapter were excerpted from the collection of Center for Community Organizing (Czech Republic).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EC	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
MRD	Ministry of Regional Development
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MI	Ministry of Interior
NDP	National Development Plan
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
OP	Operational Programme
JROP	Joint Regional Operational Programme
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations

INTRODUCTION

The demand for implementation of a partnership principle in programmes, originates from several sources. One of them is reform of European administration, which has, for 8 years, been a priority of the European Commission^{1/}. The European Commission laid the EU under an obligation to co-operate more closely with regional and local authorities, and (besides these formal structures) also with wider civil society. This co-operation is not intended to be one way and communication among concerned parties should not be established merely for the implementation of European policies, which have been already agreed.

Thus, a shared regulation system was established on European, national, regional and local level in cohesion policy area (earlier so-called structural policy). It is a so-called multilevel authority system. The systems in each member states and also in regions of each member state do, however, differ. National governments and partners on regional or local level have different competences and participation also differs.

In Central and Eastern European countries the partnership principle is still new, even though it was promoted in structural and cohesion policy since the end of 80's. Partnership was applied at first in projects, which were financed by pre-accession funds of EU, especially from Phare and Sapard funds- nearly 15 years later than in the original EU countries.

A new partnership principle was taken into account when preparing strategic development documents for implementation of the European structural policy. It was used for the first time no earlier than in preparation for the 2004–2006^{2/} period. Strategic development documents, rising in partnership of more sectors were, in that time, quite a new approach to development planning in Central and Eastern European countries. In the programming period 2004–2006, the partnership principle in Central and Eastern European countries was asserted; subsequently, also when realizing projects. Projects, in which more partners participated, were prioritized in selection and evaluation process. It was the period when partners had to learn how to prepare projects, solve and communicate together and to rely on each other. That all went in conjunction with newly-gained skills in monitoring and project realisation. First mistakes were made and it often resulted in misunderstandings. Central and Eastern European countries

^{1/} See The White Book of European Commission on European control of public issues, 2001.

^{2/} The first Central and Eastern European Countries entered into the EU in 2004.

entered the EU with experience gained from programming document preparation for 2007–2013 period. Efforts for improved partnership develops gradually also in the current programming period 2007–2013 in cohesion EU policy area. The strategic general principles of partnership for cohesion^{3/} distinguish the importance of the involvement of regional and local public administrations and their partners in the territory and especially in areas, where their understanding is critical (for example, innovation, employment rate, manpower, and social integration, support of small- and medium sized entrepreneurs, and territorial cohesion).

The partnership principle became one of the key principles of EU cohesion policy. Based on this principle, the partners take part in programming, implementation, monitoring, and on evaluation of cohesion policy on more levels (regional, national and multinational) and by involving more participants (local/regional authorities, private organizations and organizations of civil society). Partnership principle again gained in importance when the financial and operational framework for regional policy for the 2007–2013 period was formed. It also includes organizations and civil societies, ecological partners, non-governmental partners, and authorities responsible for equality between women and men^{4/}.

^{3/} Decision of Council for strategic general principles of partnership for cohesion no. 2006/702/ES.

^{4/} See also paragraph 11 of General Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006.

2. PARTNERSHIP WHILE PREPARING PROGRAMME DOCUMENTATION FOR 2007-2013 PERIOD

We have evaluated some partnership approaches based on co-operation between public administration and non-governmental, non-profit organizations in selected Central and Eastern European countries – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The civil activity can be considered very intensive and it goes back a long time. Civil activity has intensified under the influence of changes in political and economical systems (transition, 1989).

2.1. Non-profit sector

In the European Union, the topic of civil society organizations belongs to the “competence” of the member-states. There are neither common directives and rules, nor uniform determinations. As a consequence, the civil society organizations are administered by the different member-states entirely pursuing their own legal systems. It means that the practice existing in the different countries cannot always be used in another country and it is therefore necessary to take into consideration the differences of regulations and definitions when comparing different practices.

The European Union acknowledges that it is very difficult to determine the scope of civil society organizations (as their aims, structures and motivations differ from each other to a great extent and they do not have a uniform legal background either); therefore, the term “NGO” (non-governmental organization) is mainly used in the European Union for these organizations.

Pursuant to the interpretation of the document entitled “White Book on European Governance” published by the European Committee, Civil society includes the following: trade unions and employers’ organisations (“social partners”); non-governmental organisations; professional associations; charities; grass-roots organisations; organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life with a particular contribution from churches and religious communities^{5/}. Thus this concept comprises a wider social basis. All of the aforementioned organizations represent the subjects of “civil dialogue” in the wording of the European Union.

^{5/} For a more precise definition of organised civil society, see the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on “The role and contribution of civil society organisations in the building of Europe”, OJ C329, 17.11.99 p.30.

The non-profit sector consists of non-governmental, non-profit organizations (further NGOs); it is fragmented and organized with difficulties. Spontaneity is linked with other characteristics of non-profit sector: efficiency or flexibility, and readiness. This spontaneity is a strength of the non-profit sector when fulfilling its mission. During preparation of programme documents, it was not clarified which types of organizations can be considered to be non-profit organizations (of civil type) or, more precisely, which organizations can be considered by the responsible ministries to be relevant partners from the non-profit sector in a selected area or section.

Experience from the Czech Republic

The concept, “non-profit organization”, was defined for purposes of some operational programmes by the Government Board for Non-government Nonprofit organizations. Definition is basically aimed at civil associations, foundations, endowment funds, and at church corporations. It is a critical question, if this legally purist approach is right to use in the case of the relatively dynamic process of the preparation of programme documentation. When elaborating programme documentation, high-quality debate with relevant partners is needed^{6/}.

Experience from Hungary

As emerges from our research work, the government in Hungary intends to involve all the civil society partners defined by the European Union with the exception of the historical “great” churches which are treated separately by the government. The classic civil sector to be investigated by us consists, however, of the organizations and foundations which are registered and actually operating and do not engage with any economic activities and do not represent the companies performing economic activities.

2.2. Specifics of NGOs involvement in partnership with public administration

We must distinguish between when delegates of NGOs act for themselves (for their organizations) and when joint NGOs interpret wider opinion within the non-profit sector. It is a matter of concern for the non-profit sector to be able to create internal mechanisms for the selection of trustworthy and honorable

^{6/} We quote from analysis that has been worked out as a result of project „Proposal for public involvement into preparation of programme documentation for the period 2007–2013“ for the Ministry for Regional Development CR, Community Support Framework Department, Prague.

persons, who can present its interests in different working and political bodies, which are assembled on the partnership principle. These persons should be responsible for information dissemination within the non-profit sector, and for the formation of positions in wider debate. From the view of public authorities, it is further important to support the transparency and co-operation within the non-profit sector, so that these key mechanisms and principles are internalised.

Experience from Bulgaria: An on-line voting system was created in order to ensure transparency to the election into official structures of delegates of NGOs. This online platform is unique and it is the main way in which NGO representatives are selected to participate in the monitoring. First, there are nominations for NGO representatives (not less than 12 days), people send CVs after that the elections take place during 10 days. Second, the results of the elections are announced and the elected NGO representatives' names and details are published online.

Experience from the Czech Republic: NGOs delegates were chosen through regional conferences or ad hoc networks, or through the consortium of organisations (in the case of consortium existence in a particular field or region) and were eventually nominated by the proposal of Government Council for Non-government Non-profit Organizations.

Experience from Romania: An e-mail voting system from the lists the NGO representatives was used in different structures where the representation of NGOs was required. For example, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, as Management Authority for OP Environment has launched public announcement to internal vote of a NGOs representative. The call was announced using the Ministry website and environmental NGOs e-mail lists. The procedure of selection was agreed among the environmental NGOs on the e-mail lists. Proposals for NGO representatives were followed by a voting session. The Management Authority has accepted voted NGO representative and the voting report.

Experience from Hungary: Most NGOs' representatives in decision-making structures for structural funds management are the delegates of some civil platform and had been elected in a transparent way by voting. (E.g.: National Meeting of Environmental- and Nature Protection NGOs). There are, however, some cases when the president of a national umbrella organization takes part in the MC upon invitation or the delegate wasn't elected directly but nominated by the NGOs and was then accepted by voting at the government's Consultation Council.

Experience from Latvia: The approach to choosing of NGOs representatives was mixed – in some cases NGOs were selectively invited to nominate their representative to decision making structures while in other cases NGOs

could apply themselves to obtain observer status. No open voting has ever been organized in Latvia. Still the process of NGO participation has been quite open allowing those NGOs who are interested to become involved either directly or through other NGO networks.

2.3. Availability of information

Information about preparation of National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRF) was available in all Central and Eastern European countries. But one could say that it was available only for people who knew what and where to search. Availability of information for the wide public was generally low. This confirms the testimony of small non-profit organizations, which did not have any information about the preparation of programme documentation. It confirms that there is a new group of people (even in the non-profit sector), which follows this matter more closely, and which has enough information and utilizes the opportunity to be involved; we can call them “the group of experts.” Like in other cases of public participation, there is also a large “silent majority”: part of the population, which was not addressed, which does not have information, or find it difficult to track, consequently they do not understand it. This part of the non-profit sector then does not participate in document preparation.

From all questioned, the main grievance was the unintelligibility of information, documents, and booklets. They are written in a weird, official language with plenty of neologisms, which the ordinary person cannot understand. That is why it is appropriate to disseminate information s not only in written form, but also in the form of seminars and discussions.

Organizations from the “expert group”, which are able to transmit the official information on NGOs level, should be significant partners in the process of informing public. These organizations create their own websites or e-conferences, hold meeting of NGOs, but these activities are not financed from technical support (for more detail about this issue see below).

2.4. Demanding processes during programme documentation preparation

The preparation for support drawn from structural funds for the whole Central and Eastern Europe was a very intense process of learning. Programming for 2004–2006^{7/} period was for all concerned parties an opportunity to famil-

^{7/} This situation arose a bit later in Bulgaria and Romania, no sooner than in preparation for 2007–2013 period, but it has the same traits.

iarize themselves with the area, which will only gain on importance in future. Central public administration authorities did not have experience with such complicated planning processes. A significant influence on the process of the elaboration of programme documentation was the personnel capacity of ministries, or personnel amendments in key positions in all Central and Eastern European countries. Additionally, a public consultation was requested during the preparation of documents.

EU requirements for a system of partner consultation had a substantial influence on the work and approach of public administration to involve other partners into administration of public issues. It was more likely pressure from the outside; it was an effort to satisfy external expectation, rather than an autonomous process within a society. The effort to fulfill the principle of partnership was evident on the part of central authorities and this process – so far rather unknown and unverified – was established and gained its own dynamic.

During preparations for the 2007–2013 period the definition of partnership was already known. When we asked about connection of non-profit organizations from the ministry's point of view, their representatives from all countries agreed that non-profit organizations were naturally involved in the preparation process of programme documentation. Some ministries presented their attempts to involve NGOs, but they also were helpless when selecting particular NGOs, and when evaluating the contributions of partnership. When we compare this opinion with opinions of NGOs in Central and Eastern European countries, we will find some differences in the evaluation of this process.

2.5. Missing plan for partners' involvement during planning

A uniform procedure for communication with the public was missing in all countries. There was not a plan for involvement of partners, including NGOs and public, parallel or connected with the plan for document elaboration. Neither NGOs, public, nor partners had an idea how to make use of some sources, and how to take part in public debate about development priorities. The time frame was not clear either. At first, it was unclear at which stage of programming we exactly were, and then there were tight deadlines for complex, multi-part documents.

The responses of NGOs from all surveyed countries demonstrate that NGOs did not have enough high-quality information about the preparation of operational programmes. Large, experienced organizations had most information; small organizations by contrast complained of its insufficiency.

Further, the rules on how to deal with the comments was not always published or they did not exist at all (this problem was found in all Central and Eastern Eu-

ropean countries). This fault is again connected with the absence of a clear plan at the beginning of the process, which should have certainly specified these details.

In some cases, ministries distributed inaccurate or outdated information during the elaboration of documents. This situation appeared especially when ministries did not want to publish working versions of draft documents to collect comments (for example, on the internet). As a result of this, it sometimes happened that partners worked on an outdated version of the document, which later only increased their frustration and unwillingness to take part on further stages of document elaboration.

2.6. Direct involvement of NGOs during preparation of programme documentation

Experience from the **Czech Republic**: Non-profit organizations had already participated in the preparation stage in 2004–2006 period, namely, thanks to their initiative and active interest in co-operation. Within the preparation for 2007–2013 programming period, the Centre for Community Organizing in co-operation with the MRD (as contracting authority) executed the project “Opponency and recommendations to the proposals of NDP and NSRF 2007–2013 executed by non-profit sector and information campaign for non-profit sector.” NGOs’ representatives participated within this project in working groups of the Steering and Coordinating Committee and in an Expert Opponent Group. There was wide consultation process including workshops and round tables in regions; an e-consultation process and information campaign for non-profit organizations. We successfully applied necessary components^{8/} of such a process thanks to the partner co-operation between the Ministry of Regional Development and the Non-profit organization:

- Identification of interested/targeted public
- Sufficient time for effective involvement of public
- Regular notification of public and approach to the documents

In addition, the impact of the NSRF on the environment (SEA) was assessed in a participative way, when involving the NGOs.

This process made an undeniable contribution to the use of the partnership principle and for communication and also for gaining the trust between NGOs and public administration, and for eventual, systematic seizure of consultation process based on a communication plan involving the public. However, this process may be evaluated by NGOs as inefficient, especially if we evaluate the ef-

^{8/} This components were defined already on bases of Aarhus agreement seven years ago, see for example Pelcl et al.: Involving public into regional development, 2001.

fectiveness of the participatory process of NGOs and consultations on final forms from the point of view of NGOs on the final version of the NSRF document. It is obviously like that, because three other components, essential for real involvement of public, were not ensured:

- Well-timed initiation of public participation, until all possibilities were opened
- Compulsory reflection of public involvement outputs
- Public access to available declarative materials about negotiations with public.

Nevertheless, a good foundation was laid and an exemplar for managing similar consultation processes was created.

However, we did not manage to get going^{9/} on such a wide consultation progress during preparation of operational programmes. The reason for this was the fact that 24 new operational programmes were initiated in the Czech Republic, and it was unreal to manage wide consultation process for operational programmes in parallel for all of them. A potential initiator of such a process from the NGOs had no sufficient funds. Neither central public administration nor individual committees of operational programmes started such a wide consultation process. They neither adapted relatively successful models of initial partner communication from the preparation of NSFR nor continued in that model. It is also due to a difference in the willingness of particular managing authorities to involve NGOs into preparation of an operational programme. The European Commission^{10/} began in some cases to investigate the problem of lack of co-operation within the non-profit sector. These issues were discussed during the position document negotiation. The NGOs' representatives were invited to the planning teams at their request, in the case of most operational programmes. They were not initially invited by particular managing authorities – ministries – even though such an initiative was expected when we rigorously following the partnership principle.

Experience from Hungary:

National Development Concept (OFK): The purpose of this document is to establish the long-term (2007–2020) basis of development policy in Hungary. The European Union has not obliged Hungary to develop this plan – it is a voluntary

^{9/} The consultation process of NSRF had been opened however it had not continued in the preparation process of individual operational programmes. See EAPN publication “The Illusion of Conclusion”, 2005.

^{10/} See for example brief record form meeting of EC about OP Transport for 2007-2013 period.

interest of the government and the whole society! The draft of the document was published (a bit late) in June 2005 on the homepage of the Office for the National Development Plan and EU Subsidies (NFTH). The partners worked intensively in order to make their voice and views about the Concept heard. After registration, people could send their comments and views to those who had worked out the draft through the homepage of the Office and this page became the place of forwarding official information. Though there was a lot of public discussions: experts' conferences were organized as well as data collected by means of questionnaires concerning the topic of National Development Concept (OFK). All of this was carried without a preliminary strategy. In December 2005, the final version of the Concept was approved by the Hungarian Parliament.

The civil society often identified the deficiencies but the platforms and information channels had not yet been developed on the civil side. In 2005, an informal work-team was developed by the representatives of NIOK (Nonprofit Information and Training Centre Foundation), the National Society of Conservationists (Friends of the Earth Hungary) and from the Soros Foundation, the purpose of which was to follow the public debate of National Development Plan. The initiative was successful: a lot of organizations soon joined it.^{11/} The role of the workteam entitled „NGOs for the publicity of the National Development Plan (CNNy) had the role of “watchdog”. The team published seven reports about the processes up to 2008. *www.cnnny.hu* The CNNy was accepted by the government as a partner from the civil side. Among others, the CNNy achieved that the planners respond in writing to the incoming observations and they made a lot of practical suggestions concerning the process of public consultation. Surprisingly, 40% of the civil proposals were involved in the draft in spite of the arising difficulties.

However, it caused a real disappointment that – in spite of the many staff-hours – the OFK became insignificant later and a new programme was developed. For reasons of time scarcity, the Public Consultation Plan of the Second National Development Plan (i.e., NSRF, converting the OFK into plans) wasn't developed either, so the principles of public consultation remained non-transparent and had an ad hoc character for a certain time in the following planning cycle.

The “open programming” of the National Development Plan was a new method for the Hungarian government. Meanwhile, a change in officials also started at the government institutions. The young experts' “new generation” were open

^{11/} Összefogás egy adott ügy mentén – A „Civilek a Nemzeti Fejlesztési Terv Nyilvánosságáért”(CNNy) munkacsoport – Kovács Bence, Független Ökológiai Központ, http://trust.easyhosting.hu/hirek/civil_kovacs.doc letöltés: 2009.01.05.

to the new methods. However, the process was slowed by traditional bureaucracy and lack of good practice.

“New Hungary” Development Plan (NSRF 2007–2013): Following the international norms, the second National Development Plan (NFT II) had the name of National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRK). In the course of the Parliamentary election campaign in 2006, it became the “New Hungary” Program without any reason as it was stated by the quoted study of Transparency International and it became part of the election campaign program of Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) in a very controversial way. Following the public debate of the New Hungary Program, a new period of public consultation started at the end of June 2006 when the government initiated a partnership discussion for the second time about the plan designated finally “New Hungary” Development Plan (NSRF).

The process of public consultation was further co-ordinated by the National Development Agency (NDA) established by the government through merging the National Development Office (NFH) and the organizations managing the realisation of the National Development Plan.

Operational Programs (OPs): A homepage containing the updated statistical data of the utilization of First National Development Plan, the main data of all the winning applications and the results of public consultation of the documents of development politics were developed on the Internet. (*www.nfu.hu*). Here the documents of NSRF through which the different opinions can be sent can also be accessed. Six development directions of strategic importance (priorities) are determined by the NSRF (priorities) and they are divided into further departmental and regional tasks in 16 Operational Programs (OP). There has been public debate in case of 14 OP. The “Implementation OP”, drawing on Technical Assistance only, concerns the realisation of tasks of National Development Agency and those of the horizontal organizations and the financial and management tools. Despite the CN-Ny’s complaint, civil society didn’t get many opportunities to comment on this OP; the National Development Agency on the other hand declared that there would not have been any substantial comments submitted. Some NGO criticism claimed that the documents on the homepage were incomplete: crucial chapters were missing.

However, 1350 organizations took the opportunity and sent their suggestions concerning the other OPs in the form of a downloadable questionnaire or essay. Most of the opinions concerned the “Social Renewal OP” and “Transport OP”. The basis of public debate was a **structured guide to commenting** according to the statement of NDA by which the processing and involvement of the incoming opinions became technically easier. First of all, this guide promotes the internal operation of NDA; it cannot be found on the homepage under this title. The civil society can get information about the process by studying several different

titles on the homepage and so they can obtain information about the possibilities for participation this way. But no separate homepages and publications were published for the civil society. Some e-handbooks containing useful information were made by different civil organizations.

In addition, about 4000 partner organizations – among others different professional and lobby groups, civil society organizations as well as brotherhoods and the representatives of science and business – were invited by the Agency **by letters or e-mails** to take part in the consultation procedure. The list of addresses contained the people having sent their opinions earlier as well as the databases of the different ministries.

“The key to the success of the consultation procedure with partner organizations is the suitable selection of the participants therefore the National Development Agency counts on the opinion of those organizations and institutions that represent authentically the given special field or social group and have not only rights but take the responsibility for the role they play in the process. The National Development Agency informed its constant and key partners about the expected date of public commenting by sending an e-mail previously. Moreover, the summaries of action plans were published by the Agency on this website for those interested in the procedure. It means everybody could send proposals or write his/her opinions to the given e-mail address^{12/} – the public consultation procedure of the Action Plans of NSRF for 2007–2008 can be read about. (Action plans are implementation documents of OPs, prepared for two years and reviewed regularly.)

Thus, it follows from the aforementioned facts that although the National Development Agency ensures that everybody can write proposals and comments on the homepage, only some selected NGOs have the possibility for real consultation, personal exchange of views and for participating in workshops. The selection criteria of these “VIP partners” have not, however, been regulated yet.

Consequently, the civil people – as any other person in Hungary who has an Internet access – can obtain information about the making of programme documentation concerning the years of 2007–2013. Those without an Internet access can buy the printed version of these documents at net cost. From the point of view of comprehension, the people who favoured us with an interview evaluated the published information good and understandable. The information comprised all the operational programmes of NSRF although certain parts of the chapters were insufficient.

^{12/} http://www.nfu.hu/tarsadalmi_egyeztetesen_az_uj_magyarorszag_fejlesztesi_terv_elso_ket_eves_aktiotervei

In Spring 2005, the achievement of obtaining the information was investigated in various special fields (planning, writing applications, bringing decisions, realisation, monitoring) by the Hungarian branch of Transparency International and they came to the conclusion that “a lot of information is available concerning the Structural Funds but some details of the information are not understandable enough and they are not systematized according to the target groups. It happens sometimes that the beneficiaries themselves cannot obtain enough information about the process in which they take part. Probably as a consequence, the media-workers are not able to transmit important messages about this topic”. It would be advisable to publish more plain information about the institutional system, the role of the different institutions, their scope of responsibility as well as the procedures in order to develop the access to information. More and plainer media campaigns would be necessary about the Structural Funds (it is necessary to emphasize the importance of funds and not only the scandals), and, therefore, it is most essential to emphasize the importance of the topic for the media workers.”^{13/} No significant changes had occurred in this field even two years later. The formation of basic documents still cannot be followed by civil society and some state that even the ministries cannot follow it.

“All the opinions received up to the deadline were processed by the Agency in Tables in accordance with the structure of the given operational program. The planning teams responsible for the given topic made their proposals for the comments included in the aforementioned Tables by indicating the accepted, the refused and partly accepted ‘status’. Both in the case of the sectoral and the regional operational programs, the final outcome of the individual proposals will first be discussed by an Interdepartmental Committee for Operational Programs negotiating for 2-2 days then it will be decided by the Steering Committee for Planning”^{14/} – it can be read on the homepage of NDA.

In addition, consultation-forum-series were organized by the NDA for discussing all the priorities of NSRF; these priorities are as follows: education, employment, public health, economics, transport, state reform, regional development, tourism, environmental protection, energetics – by the participation of the representative of the concerned special department and the competent member of the Government Commission for Development Policy.

^{13/} Strukturális alapok átlátható felhasználása Magyarországon – Projekt beszámoló 2006-10-25;
Forrás: <http://www.transparency.hu/files/p/336/7187054169.doc>, letöltés: 2009.01.04

^{14/} http://www.nfu.hu/operativ_programok_egyeztetese letöltés 2009.01.05

The NSRF was placed on the agenda **by the highlighted macro-forums**, among others, by the National Council for the Reconciliation of Interests (the NDA regularly holds a meeting with the National Development Committee of this Council that prepares the decisions), the Economic and Social Council, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the National Council on the Environment, the National Council for Regional Development as well as the National Development Council established on 5 September 2006.

At regional level, the process of public consultation on the Regional Operational Programs (ROP) was co-ordinated by the **Regional Development Agencies (RDA)**. Owing to the different interpretation of the rule-system, they used different methods in the individual regions. In some regions, the opinions/comments were received in public forums or by correspondence-lists and workshops were organized for this purpose in other regions. The civil (CSO/NGO) people mentioned that they were not invited to certain **work-groups** in spite of the fact that they asked for it and that the information-flow was not always uniform. Therefore, they used the informal channels. At the same time the CSO/NGO people recognized that they were not able to mobilize a lot of civil groups in order to give their opinions. Mainly the national organizations (as well as the regional or county-level organizations) actively used the possibility to take part in the planning. Only a few organizations operating in a village or in a micro-region sent their opinions and these opinions concerned exclusively the regional operational programs. The collected proposals/comments were sent by the RDAs to the NDA where these proposals were summarised and processed. The final decision about the content of ROPs was made in the NDA; so, the drafts determined in the regions with regional priorities and accepted by the regional development councils were often overwritten and overridden.

The NSRF was discussed at the meetings of the **regional development councils** in the region-centres as well with the participation of the civil delegates. The Law on Regional and Spatial development (1996) modified in 2004 prescribes the method of establishment of **NGO reconciliation forums (CEF)** and their representative status on the different levels (national, regional, county- and micro-regional levels). The CEFs are legally acknowledged to represent NGOs of a certain region (or any territorial level) in regional development decision-making; they are entitled to express public opinion; however, their effectiveness is lower than it can be expected and they operate mainly on a regional and national level; at lower level, only few are active.

The above process of consultation is valid even for the levels that are under the level of operational programs which are not regulated by the EU.

Results: Following the evaluation of the proposals and suggestions received, the organizations, which sent their opinions, received personal **response let-**

ters. In the case of the rejected proposals, civil society organizations considered that the short explanations were not enough. It was not clear for the civil society organizations how the professional evaluation of the incoming proposals was carried out and who were entitled to do it!

We can summarize the experiences by saying that the team processing the NGO proposals accepted a part of them, especially in the case of sectoral operational programs. About 10% of the proposals were accepted. As regards regional OPs, most of the opinions were not involved in them. It was only possible for civil society to have some insignificant parts of the content changed and some changes in wording or language implemented. The team did not make any difference between the opinions with wide-scale public backing proposed by several stakeholders and those of individuals and small interest groups. The people interviewed by us were disappointed when they saw the results. They considered that only few civil proposals were included in the OPs and they regretted the great number of work-hours devoted to this topic. In their opinion, this is the reason for the fact that the civil side has become tired and their activity has decreased.

Here we have to note that – by taking into consideration the Hungarian historical, economic-social background – the establishment of relatively clear processes of public consultation can in itself be considered an achievement.

The composition of Monitoring Committees is in accordance with the rules; the representatives of the classical civil society organizations as well as the representatives of the platforms of civil organizations take also part in them. The proportion of classical civil society organizations/foundations is 10% and the proportion of NGOs is 30–50%. In their opinion, most of the members (even non-governmental ones including regions, alliances of local governments, academy, unions and chambers and civil society) are loyal to the government; therefore, the decisions mainly depend on the representatives of regions and not on the civil society's delegates.

Experience from Bulgaria

For NGOs, a great handicap was the administrative and financial load. Organizations, which could not afford to dedicate at least a bit of the work time of their professionals to participate in the planning process, participated minimally. One of the impacts of this fact was the formation of a relatively small group of people (organizations), which were interested themselves in this issue and had time, financial and intellectual capacities to follow this process in details^{15/}. Finally, these people (and organizations) became “the voice of non-profit sector” in programming phase.

Only a formal possibility for NGOs involvement in the preparation of NSRF was actually made available. Non-profit organizations felt generally visible lack of transparently available information. Informed NGOs, were involved directly in working groups, or in committees, in commenting procedures, or participated in consultations and in commenting within the SEA process. However, in many cases the opinion of NGOs was not taken into consideration and that is why the involvement of NGOs was ineffective. The NGOs were involved too late to change the final design of the documents. That is why non-profit organizations were also preparing their independent viewpoints addressed to official authorities and documents' developers. NGOs had most information about NSRF, information about operational programmes were more fragmented. NGOs in Bulgaria evaluate this participatory effort of NSRF^{16/} preparation as insufficient. There were some examples of good approaches on the part of individual officers but these were not officially supported and it led to their resignation or to restriction of their activities.

Experience from Slovakia

Based on negative experience from preparation of programme documentation for 2004–2006 period, the Slovak NGOs opened discussion immediately after beginning of NSRF preparation in the year 2004 on how to avoid the mistakes of the previous period. Despite of official assurance, there was only a little improvement and often only a formal one. The NGOs were again involved in the preparation of programme documentation only formally, so they decided to boycott it at the end of the year 2005. In this way, the NGOs expressed their essential disagreement with the partnership principle – breaking on the part of public authorities responsible for preparation of their countries for the 2007–2013 period, and for preparation of appropriate use of structural funds and the Cohesion Fund of the European Union.

Such collective absence of NGO delegates from the work of committees had never happened in EU before. It became the target of increased attention on the part of the European Commission, media, and NGOs^{17/} network. The Slovak non-profit organizations managed to repair communication with NGOs and to improve the transparency of the process. For this reason the NGOs decided to continue

^{15/} Financial sources for these activities were especially from Phare fund, and further from resources of multinational foundations, let us name at least Open Society Fund, George Soros and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. These resources are currently limited in Central and Eastern European territory.

^{16/} Bulgaria entered the EU on 1.1.2007.

working with the operational programmes. There was, however, a premature election in the Slovak parliament, which influenced the programming, and made the already fussy process of programme documentation preparation even faster. That resulted in mistake reiteration, which were the original reasons for the boycott – too short deadlines for commenting on, documents sent only few days prior to the meeting. NGOs and other partners, including regional and local self-government bodies could not participate effectively again. The intervening commenting process was shortened into five days^{18/}. As a result, none of the NGOs' suggestions were taken into consideration in the operational programmes. The situation changed after the parliamentary elections, when public authorities still tried to change form of NSRF and operational programmes, including the elaboration of NGOs comments. It was, however, neither conceptual nor effective.

Experience from Romania

The participation of NGOs in preparation programme documentation was very weak. NGOs did not have enough information and experience from the programming period 2004–2006. Only some informed NGOs participated in different working groups in the beginning of the programming process. Later the NGO community made some pressure to the government on different ways, including the boycott methods used also by the Slovakian colleagues in order to improve the participation of the NGOs in different official structures. As result of these pressures the participation of NGOs has improved. However, the low administrative and financial capacity is the main obstacle for serious participation in the programming process.

Experience from Poland

The Polish NGOs' office in Brussels established the secretariat to assist the Polish NGOs, when involving them in national development plan consultations 2007–2013 (NDP). The secretariat created a special website section (*www.npr.ngo.pl*), among other activities publishing documents, experience, comments of NGOs, and organizing internet discussion groups. Experts on regional structural funds

^{17/} The British politically-sarcastic magazine 'Private Eye' concisely characterized it "How many NGOs in Europe are ready to follow the example of Slovaks, and are ready to give up the share on the graph to achieve the transparency and public control?", in *Aktuality Priatel'ov Zeme-CEPA*, January 2006.

^{18/} The process evaluation of EU funds for years 2007–2013 from NGO's point of view. *Priatel'ia Zeme - CEPA*, 2007.

held discussions in Polish regions, and SPLOT network offered micro-grants for NGOs involvement process support, and for facilitation of discussion on/about NDP. NGOs took part in official conferences, which were regionally organized by public administration. The office of Polish NGOs in Brussels considered the most important thing in the whole process the formation of the NGOs' expert teams, which had enough knowledge and experience to run the consultation process, to take over the official documents, and to formulate comments, complete the suggestions, and to co-operate closely with official programming committees. The government was ready to share first suggestions of NDP with NGOs, and to coordinate the consultation processes. More than 1000 active NGOs participated in the process. However, the NGOs themselves think that the final document was only insignificantly amended. The formality of the NGOs process involvement is problem in all EU14 countries. In Central and Eastern European countries is the formulism accompanied with the mix of non-acquaintance of non-profit sector, specifics of its involvement, and non-acquaintance of public involvement techniques with unwillingness and worries with "extra work." Here, prevails the inexperience with open discussion management during the strategic planning, rather than efforts to make the process less (or more) transparent, how is it that the public authority is often suspicious on the part of the unquestioned public.

The formality of the process is typical especially for absence of public involvement plan, which should be integrated in the document preparation^{19/}. As a result of it, there is not enough time for necessary public consultations (i.e. not only NGOs, but also private sector and local or regional self-governments). There is very short time for commenting on the complex strategic documents, and it is a source of passivity of public majority and disillusion of those, who want to participate in the process. Another mistake originates from non-planning of public involvement when consultation process often proceeds too late to significantly amend the programme documentation – that is, at the end of its elaboration. The low willingness of programme committees to significantly amend or complete the document at that time is obvious.

Another source of formalism is non-acquaintance of the techniques, which could help to manage the public consultations. There is currently only one technique used, which uses the written process of commenting on the documents published on the internet. Integration of the suggestions on the part of NGOs in particular operational programmes varies. Mostly, the NGOs feel that the techni-

^{19/} It describes for example the EAPN in its publication "The illusion of inclusion," Euro Citizen Action Service, 2005.

cal suggestions (the document form and spelling) were accepted more easily than suggestions, which were essential for the NGOs. This all increases the passivity of consulting subjects. This arises, when document preparation partners' opinions could not be discussed. It shows that merely commenting on the documents is an insufficient technique, and that discussion should be held about essential suggestions already in the preparation stage of draft versions of the document. The integration of comments without the possibility to discuss and argue with partners, (whether in support of the suggestion or for its rejection) weakens the consultation process and affects the stability among partners.

The reflection on the whole process is lacking in the EU countries – the Czech Republic at least published the final report, which deals with the consultation process of NSRF. Only one government – Estonia – published an independent report describing the whole consultation process^{20/}.

Experience from Latvia

NGOs took opportunity to be involved in the preparation of programme documentation for the period of 2007–2013. They have already experience from 2004–2006 period. Although the programming process was open and transparent only few NGOs used the opportunities for active involvement.

Ministry of Finance was responsible for coordination of the whole programming process. Special website was established and regularly updated (*www.esfondi.lv*). Almost all programme documentations drafts along with information about time schedule of programming process were available allowing NGOs, other institutions and public to follow the process and to participate. Still there were only about 3–5 environmental NGOs which followed the process regularly because NGOs capacity was not sufficient.

Environmental, social and educational NGOs were actively involved in the elaboration of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and Operational programmes. The content of the NSRF was based to large extent on the National Development Plan elaborated earlier covering all aspects of socio-economic development. NGOs focused on planned allocations of EU funds for different priorities. Unfortunately, these allocations were the question of political decision missing needs assessment. Later, social and educational NGOs were successful in negotiating of allocation increase of investments in human capital. However, environmental NGOs were less successful in their efforts to increase allocations for environmental protection, renewable energy and energy efficiency measures.

^{20/} "The illusion of inclusion," Euro Citizen Action Service, 2005.

NGOs took an opportunity to take a part in direct consultation meetings as well as to submit written comments in Operational programmes. The Ministry of Finance organized several consultations rounds with partner institutions and NGOs submitting comments to Ops drafts.

Strategic environmental assessments (SEA) of NSRF and Ops, simultaneously with ex-ante evaluation were started in advanced stages of the programming process and they were opened to public commenting. However, only few environmental NGO representatives took part in a public hearing and submitted comments to the SEA. Low activity can be partly explained by long process, huge delay and sceptical opinion of the usefulness of SEA and ex-ante evaluation and their impacts on the planning documentation.

After the OPs had been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers were NGOs involved in preparing lower level programming documentation: National programmes and project selection and evaluation criteria.

NGOs prepared several briefing papers during programming process and communicated their concerns to the Monitoring Committee, DG Environment and DG Regio. Environmental NGOs co-operated actively with the Ministry of Environment and other stakeholders.

2.7. NGOs specific problems during involvement into programme documentation preparation

There were some problems during the participation of the non-profit organizations in programming document preparation process. They resulted especially from insufficient administration capacity. The small administrative capacity is a major problem for NGOs participating in decision-making processes in CEE countries and it is the main obstacle to equal partnership between NGOs and decision-makers.

Small administration capacity

The development of programme documentation is capacity-intensive for all participants in the process – in light of time, their knowledge, energy to study, and commenting on extensive documents. Partnership is not without costs. During the process of operational programme preparation, NGOs' delegates had to be financed by their native organization. Their activity was fully dependent on the financial situation of their organization. Contrary to the public administration delegates (officers, politicians), who deal with this issue in their working time, the operation of the NGOs delegates is not only unpaid, but also the operational costs for their presence (traveling expenses for the board meetings, accommodation expenses, expert consultation expenses) are not paid for. The financial sources, which would

subsidize the non-profit organizations in the form of grants and projects and would allow them to fully participate in these processes, were significantly suppressed after 2004^{21/}. In addition, non-profit organizations did not have, and often do not have, the access to the funding from technical assistance sources.

“All of the civil society delegates try to inform the organizations and platforms represented by them about the activity of MCs. However, they mostly write about the interesting details in e-mail in the electronic correspondence-list only. Each civil society member of the MCs is considered an equal partner in the Committees. However, many of them mentioned that all the other members of MCs get a salary for representing their field, except for the civil society delegates; the civil members do this activity voluntarily and, with time, this can result in burn-out. From another standpoint, they only have a representative role as they are in minority and not really able to influence the processes. Just like other members of committee, they also receive the documents 10–14 days before the meeting but there is no time to prepare a thorough, professional view on the content of the documents or forward them to experts for advice because of the high quantity of the received documents. No financial resources are available for asking experts to give an expert opinion on the documents” (results from the Hungarian research).

Passivity of the non-profit organizations

Some of the non-profit organizations (or the whole sections of non-profit sector) were in programming process quite passive. They were unable to react fast enough, to spread the information and to get feedback from other NGOs during the involvement process. The cause was above all the complexity of the whole issue and unintelligibility (language, rules and procedures, effects and real outputs). Additionally, the place where the debate took place was sometimes unclear – there were frequent questions: who communicates with whom, who is responsible for particular outputs, who will elaborate the proposals for amendment. Solidity of the process did not encourage enough wider groups of people and organizations to participate. Non-governmental non-profit organizations were not often able to evaluate the importance of the excursive processes, to orientate themselves in complex rules for programme documentation processing, to orientate themselves in the changing work schedule, and to separate the important decisions (their formulation is that it is compulsory to attend) from

^{21/} Foreign corporations, which supported the democracy development in CCE countries, moved the support further to the east.

the less important. Experts were missing – consultants, who would be able to clarify the process, and to manage. The reason was again the small administration capacity, which did not enable them to manage the process of involvement.

3. NGOS INVOLVEMENT IN OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES' MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN 2007-2013 PERIOD

Basically, each operational programme has its own Managing Authority and Monitoring Committee^{22/}. In the implementation stage the co-operation of these two structures is most significant. The monitoring committee is partnership structure consisting of delegates from all sectors. Its decisions reflect the ongoing evaluation of results of the operational programme and have fundamental influence on the documents, which are important for the next stage of the implementation. Monitoring committees determine their rules of operation. Monitoring committees are generally held at least once or twice a year and decision-making process is based on "per rollam"^{23/} procedures between meetings. The form of decision-making regulates the rules of procedure of each monitoring committee. Information about monitoring committees and their members are available on the internet (officially in all Central and Eastern European countries, which we examined), but sometimes they cannot be found. Information from monitoring committee meetings, rules of procedures, or minutes are rarely published. The fact, that partnership-based structures are non-transparent creates a problem. This problem appears in the all the Central and Eastern European countries under scrutiny. Bulgaria and Latvia are exceptions, where all of the minutes from committee meetings and decisions of monitoring committees are published on the internet.

3.1. Monitoring committees of operational programmes

The monitoring committee along with Managing Authority ensures effectiveness and quality of operational programme^{24/} implementation. Monitoring committees (MC) are created to conform to article 63 of General Regulation.

The monitoring committees are created by the member-state in agreement with the managing authorities. The principles of partnership as well as gender

^{22/} In exceptional cases, a Managing Authority and a Monitoring Committee may supervise several OPs – eg. in Hungary, the Social Infrastructure and the Social Renewal OPs belong to one and the same MA and MC.

^{23/} Distance voting, according to beforehand established rules, most often through e-technology.

^{24/} Article 66 of the General Regulation of the Council (EC) No. 1083/2006.

balance should be enforced in the course of selecting the members for the Monitoring Committee.

The operation of committees set up in accordance with the Regulation of European Union and national legislation is regulated by their rules of procedure. The position and task of the MC are defined in the status of each of them, and their working system is established in rules of procedure, which is accepted by MC along with Managing Authority. Monitoring committee sits at least twice a year.

Monitoring committee tasks^{25/}:

(a) consider and approve the criteria for selecting the operations financed within six months of the approval of the operational programme and approve any revision of those criteria in accordance with programming needs;

(b) review periodically progress made towards achieving the specific targets of the operational programme on the basis of documents submitted by the managing authority;

(c) examine the results of implementation, particularly the achievement of the targets set for each priority axis and the evaluations;

(d) consider and approve the annual and final reports on implementation;

(e) are informed of the annual control report, or of the part of the report referring to the operational programme concerned, and of any relevant comments the Commission may make after examining that report or relating to that part of the report;

(f) may propose to the managing authority any revision or examination of the operational programme;

(g) consider and approve any proposal to amend the content of the Commission decision on the contribution from the Funds.

However, the revealed competence problems were not corrected. Most of the NGOs' delegates feel a strong centralization effect from the government. The decision about the centralisation of tasks and responsibilities that had earlier been carried out by intermediary organizations was made at governmental level without public consultation. In the NGOs' delegates' opinion, the MC doesn't play a real role and only a little information is given instead.

No expert group, which could promote professional efficiency and effectiveness of MC's, is available. The members have to rely upon the information that is given to them by the government. Therefore, there isn't any real discussion and the civil delegates are frustrated from many perspectives.

^{25/} Article 65 of the General Regulation of the Council (EC) No. 1083/2006.

3.2. NGOs' representatives in monitoring committees

Monitoring committee constitution should correspond with the partnership principle. The NGOs' delegates generally participate in monitoring committees of particular operational programmes. The number of NGOs' delegates in committees and their realistic potential to participate differs. It sometimes happens that the NGOs' representative is not treated equally in monitoring committees.

Experience from the Czech Republic: In each of 24 monitoring committees is one NGO's representative. Generally, there is one (exceptionally up to 3) NGO's delegate in a monitoring committee of thirty. The NGOs delegates have the same rights as the rest of the committee members; there are, however, some MCs, where the NGOs' delegates are in the position of observers.

Experience from Hungary: The civil members are involved in the Monitoring Committees but these members have in reality little influence on the actual realisation of programmes. It seems there isn't any feedback. The serious and important decisions are not made by the Monitoring Committees, their power has decreased and their role has become formal since the period of 2004-2006. Following the Hungarian government decree No. 255/2006 (XII.8), the civil society organizations representing the horizontal aspects are involved in the Monitoring Committees; they are as follows: one environmental NGO as well as the delegates of at least one civil society organization representing the Romany people, the people with disabilities and gender equality issues.

In accordance with legislation, the managing authority asked the following organizations to delegate members with voting right to each MC:

- a) The delegate of the annual National Meeting of Environmental- and Nature Protection NGOs;
- b) A delegate of NGO side of the Romany Integration Council, the Council for Women's and Men's Social Equality and the National Disability Affairs Council representing the above interest groups.

Pursuant to the information from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the civil side of both the Romany Integration Council and the National Disability Affairs Council has been established in an open and transparent manner and they are considering introducing a similar mechanism for the establishment of the civil side of the Council for Women's and Men's Social Equality.

Moreover, one representative of the employees' side and one representative of the employers' side of the National Council for the Reconciliation of Interests are delegated as a member to each Monitoring Committee. Depending on the character of the operational program, other civil organizations can also participate as the representatives of the professional field^{26/} - it can be read on the homepage of NDA.

All the interviewed NGO members of MCs have the right to vote.

Experience from Slovakia: The NGOs' delegates have always had the right to participate in decision-making and to vote in the MC.

Experience from Bulgaria: There are 10% of NGOs' delegates (two out of twenty members) in the MC. NGOs' delegates are not always voting members of the monitoring committees. They have only the right to participate in the meeting as observers in some MCs (for example, the Monitoring Committee of the OP Environment. The NGOs' delegates of the OP Regional Development MC raised an objection to a proposal of another MC representatives. The substance of the objection was maximum amount of money, which companies could receive from the Rural Development Programme. The essence of the objection was conflict of interest and corruption. The objection was accepted and the proposal rejected. (Nevertheless, this proposal was submitted again by another MC member).

Experience from Poland: NGOs' delegates are members of all monitoring committees with the right to vote. However, in many cases, the NGOs' representatives do not communicate with wider NGO community about the work and decisions in Monitoring Committees. This is partly due to the general perception of the role of Monitoring Committees as not significant or not clear.

Experience from Latvia: There is one joint Monitoring committee for all three Operational programmes. The composition of the MC is prescribed in by-law where members with full voting rights and observers are named and also the procedure of applying for participation is described. Most of NGOs representatives have the status of observers in MC. Proposals to decision are circulated to all members prior the MC meetings and all documentation and minutes from meetings are available on the website maintained by the Ministry of Finance (*www.esfondi.lv*).

Experience from Romania: There are 10% of NGOs' delegates in the MC, in reality is it even less: 2 NGO members out of 27 full members and 19 observers. NGOs' delegates are not always voting members of the monitoring committees.

We were also interested, where the key decisions take place. If they happen at the monitoring committees' meetings, or rather off-stage. An interesting experience came from **Bulgaria and Romania**, where NGOs' delegates confirmed that lobbying is very important, when promoting the opinions of NGOs. Some of them devote themselves regularly to lobbying, the other two respondents contradict that view. They say that lobbying is not significant and they have no time for it. The meetings outside of the committee are considered to be insignificant

^{26/} http://www.nfu.hu/monitoring_bizottsagok, 2009.01.05.

in Slovakia, even though the NGOs' delegates devote their time to it. A similar situation is found even in **Czech Republic**.

In **Hungary**, most of the civil delegates are in contact with each other besides the Committee meetings as well, they harmonise their opinions and positions; this is very important for them. The representatives of government-side also experience this. It is very varied if, and to what extent, civil society delegates contact other members of the MC outside the official meetings. Most of them try to find informal opportunities for regular contact but there others who only meet exceptionally or never meet except in the official meetings. The civil society delegates themselves declare that their influence strongly depends on their personality, their capacity for the vindication of interests and their competence.

The NGOs' delegates transmit information from monitoring committees to non-profit organizations. From the questionnaire survey, we discovered that NGOs in all countries are interested in information coming from monitoring committees. There are at least web sites of e-conferences to inform the NGOs in all countries. These tools are managed and financed by NGOs' projects that are however not financed by Structural funds.

Paradoxically, the information activities of NGOs are not financed by Technical assistance^{27/} which should help to improve the dissemination of information about European funds and support the absorption capacity.

3.3. NGOs' involvement in evaluation processes

The involvement of NGOs in evaluation processes was not the task of our survey. However, as follows from our experience, there is only basic knowledge about evaluation processes in CEE countries and the role of partnership during evaluation.

Operational programmes are evaluated by means of monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring is aimed at direct results and outputs of the projects, observance of monitoring indicators, and proper use of financial resources in projects. The

^{27/} The Technical assistance represents only a part of financial resources from each operational programme (up to 4%). It is dedicated to management, monitoring and information. In addition to it, whole new operational programme "Technical Assistance" was approved in Czech Republic. It was designed to support effective implementation, management, control, monitoring and evaluation of NSRF implementation on the national level. It also covers activities of economic and social structure policy in Czech Republic in the years 2007-2013.

^{28/} The obligation of evaluation results for NSRF and for OP based on par. 45 to 47 of General Regulation (EC No. 1083/2006)

evaluation is aimed at evaluation of impact and maintainability of the operational programme. It investigates, for example, whether particular supported projects effectively achieve the operational programme and NSRF goals, and notes the sustainability of results achieved^{28/}. The purpose of evaluation is to enhance the quality and effectiveness of operational programmes. It is also focused on specific structural issues of the member country, and sustainable development.

Further operational programmes should be evaluated in the current programming period 2007–2013 by immediate need (ad hoc) in dependence of monitoring results (task deviations, revision requirements and so on) – for better implementation process, on-going or strategic.

Evaluation can examine efficiency and impact from programme realisation according to defined goals and relevance of their setting including proposing recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of OP. If we want to analyze the purpose of a non-profit organization in the realization of the Structural Funds programme, then the ongoing or ad-hoc evaluation is appropriate. Evaluation goes into more details and uses the results of monitoring, which is rather aimed at satisfying particular indicators and the monitoring of financial streams.

According to the recommendation of European Commission, non-profit organizations are welcome partners in the evaluation process. The recommendation to involve the non-profit organizations in the evaluation process derives from European Commission's^{29/} documents. The principle of partnership and the involvement of non-profit organization is recommended by the European Commission both for preparation of plans for evaluation, and for involvement in the evaluation and for involvement in the writing of evaluation reports. NOGs representatives can serve as members of working groups, which should be created for each evaluation. The European Commission encourages the formation of such working groups to assure the independence and quality of evaluation. It is further recommended that working group members be also delegates of civil society. However, for example, there is no support for the involvement of civil society from the Czech recommendations^{30/}, and the role of partnership is also missing.

^{29/} Indicative guidelines on evaluation methods: evaluation during the programming period, Working Document 5, EC, April 2007.

^{30/} Instructions for evaluation assurance of agricultural and social cohesion programmes (add. No. 5 to "Methodic for preparation of programme documentation for 2007-2013 period).

4. BOTTLENECKS IN NGOs' INVOLVEMENT INTO PREPARATION, MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMME DOCUMENTATION

Restricted capacities of non-profit organizations represent the biggest problem. Improved co-operation and development of partnership structures cannot be expected until the NGOs have equal access to conditions for preparation, monitoring, implementation processes and until viability of particular non-profit organizations are improved. Non-profit organizations should be self-confident and equal partners of public administration. It is essential for the next development and consolidation of the partnership.

Non-profit organizations need to educate their experts and managers, make use of consultants, utilise information technologies in order to communicate effectively and for faster co-operation when drafting, discussing or commenting on documents concerning the non-profit sector. Last but not least, they need equal access to technical assistance that is devoted to this purpose.

Almost all interviewees think that the major obstacle to successful civil advocacy is that civil society organizations have little financial and personal capacity, and the competence of the delegated persons is a further key factor. The government sides also agree with this. It means that the selection should be made with greater care. Though no political corruption was experienced, a lot of the civil delegates mention the low political support for partnership as a reason for this situation. The lack of lobby-power and negotiation ability of civil society delegates were also mentioned by the government side.

5. NGOs AS PROJECT BENEFICIARIES

Non-profit organizations in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary have long experience with utilization of financial resources from EU funds (pre – accession assistance since 1990s, 2004–2006 period). For many of them the realisation of European projects and European Social Fund was the first professional experience (There was the Operational Programme Human Resources Development and the Global grant for NGOs in the Czech Republic). They have learned professional management and teamwork; they introduced new procedures and developed their activity. Non-profit organizations from Bulgaria and Romania gained relevant experiences from pre-accession assistance grants.

5.1. Bottlenecks during projects realisation

The financing of NGOs activity in Central and Eastern European countries is evaluated to be highly problematic. It is so serious that it practically disallows the non-profit organizations to utilize these funds.

a) Internet sources of information

Applicants can obtain the suitable information in the period of writing the application, the necessary documents and auxiliary materials on websites of operational programmes. But it can be obtained only by those who have an Internet access. Though the Internet access in CEE countries overall is quite suitable, there are settlements where broadband Internet connection is not yet available and where only a minority of the population uses Internet regularly.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the most effective means of information flow is the internet and it is today impossible to realize any projects successfully without it.

b) Interim payments, final payment and cash flow problems

“Ex-post” payment of all costs after completing the project, or after completing a project phase, is always a big problem not only for NGOs, but also for other small applicants (SME, schools, small cities etc.). With regard to low capital capacity they are not able to cover these siftings in cashflow. Moreover, NGOs have not even the possibility to get cash, credit or to a current account in a bank or from a national or local authority. This system disadvantages the NGOs since the NGOs do not have the opportunity to invest bigger amounts of money in projects and wait for return in form of grant after the project realisation.

For this reason, the new continuous monitoring system has been introduced by managing authorities in some operational programmes in the 2004–2006 period. It, theoretically, enables the debts to be discharged continuously after three months. The financial stress on the organization would not have to be so high. However, this system failed in all Central and Eastern European countries. This is how it works: the project beneficiaries indeed submit monitoring reports every three months (which enormously increases their workload) but payments come with a great delay: 6 or 12 months. This is caused by underestimated capacity of managing authorities for the control of monitoring reports and payments' orders. This problem exists in all surveyed Central and Eastern European countries^{31/}. Some organizations found it so inconvenient that they do not make use of European money even in areas where they are experienced and where it is most appropriate. These problems caused the NGOs to have restricted access to the financial resources from Structural funds. Even though NGOs' requirements to co-finance the projects are very low (0% for Czech NGOs, 0–2.7% for Bulgarian NGOs, 0–10% for Hungarian NGOs, 10–25% for Polish NGOs, and 0–25% for Romanian NGOs), the typical civil society organizations do not generally have their own resources.

Recently, the last 10–20% of support was transferred to the applicant after completing the project and after accepting the final report. As a consequence, applicants sometimes hadn't received the last instalment for years even or couldn't continue their activity owing to financial difficulties (bankruptcy, liquidity problems).

The problem of cashflow and balance sustainability is the main problem for NGOs in all CEE countries. The system of delayed interim and last payments led to the bankruptcy of NGOs in CEE countries after 2004–2006 period, including these NGOs which were before sufficiently experienced to start a European project (we have enough evidence to make this claim stand). This is not a problem only for NGOs, but also the problem for managing authorities since the projects of bankrupted NGOs are not closed and these NGOs no longer exist.

Moreover, delayed payments could be a significant part of the overall problem of low absorption from the European Social Fund in CEE countries.

c) Bureaucracy and administration

Non-profit organizations criticise the rampant bureaucracy, when realizing the grants from operational programmes. Especially:

^{31/} Many articles have been published regarding the problem with delays for example in Bulgaria, see <http://evropa.dnevnik.bg/show/?storyid=581060>

- Complexity and formality of utilization rules
- Setting stricter rules than usual (in comparison with grant systems established in “old” EU countries or in particular General Directorates of European Commission)
- Too frequent changes of EU fund financing rules
- Dissemination of methodology and criteria
- Absence of punishment of responsible programme officers for mistakes and their public representation

These are why non-profit organizations find the European resources non-transparent and point to conflict of interest in operational programmes: There are institutions, which both manage the funds and absorb the funds (for example, regional self-governments in some countries).

d) Durability of results

Sustainability of results of realized and successful project is another problem. This problem is more evident for NGOs from countries, where at least one programming period has already passed. In the Czech Republic: The government does not allocate any resources to disseminate good practice; it does not plan any systems to maintain projects’ results and outputs. The Czech Republic has not created a method for the transfer of NGOs’ good practices into public authority activities. As a result, even very good non-profit activities become bankrupt as they lack continual financing (for example, in the sphere of education, social services etc.). They become bankrupt shortly after the European project has finished – further financing is not found. “European money stands on the clay legs of Czech finance”^{32/}, is the feeling of non-profit organizations from their experiences in the last programming period. Nevertheless, one of the main criteria for project selection is durability^{33/}. This issue applies to all Central and Eastern European countries surveyed.

e) Technical assistance

Non-profit organizations criticise the fact that the Technical assistance section does not assist the NGOs to understand the programming process, nor does it help the NGOs to take an active part in the preparation of programme documentation or take part in monitoring and evaluation.

^{32/} Quotation from SWOT analysis to Non-profit sector development conception, the Government Board for NGOs, 2008.

^{33/} According to Regulation (EC) No. 1868/2006, Article 57.

Usually, the Technical Assistance budget is centralised and belongs to a national authority – for example, in the form of OP Technical Assistance managed by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic or, as in Bulgaria, the budget belongs to the National Development Agency and the Regional Development Agencies. The national managing authorities finance their own advisory network and the activities determined in the law as well as the powerful success-communication or propaganda.

In our opinion, the part of Structural Funds expendable for information and communication could be utilised more effectively and expediently for the training of the potential applicants (providing detailed information, consultation concerning the applications etc.), research or needs analysis than for advertising some successful projects.

Support of projects' applicants and projects' beneficiaries in form of individual consultations and guidance is needed. The non-profit organizations form a specific group with specific difficulties. When developing European projects, this group, has to overcome specific problems like: cashflow, pre-financing, multi-source financing, constantly unclear questions linked with use of "de minimis" for NGOs community projects, a low level and small number of middle managers.

5.2. Examples of how to solve NGOs' problems in CEE countries

We were interested to discover whether there are some tools in CEE countries which could help to decrease the financial and administrative threshold. This threshold disallows the NGOs from using the Structural funds.

a) Capacity building

Czech Republic: There is no stated support for NGOs, which would be aimed at overall capacity- building, education and professionalization. The NGOs have, however, the opportunity to apply for financial support within the Operational Programme on Employment. This support exists in two fields. One of them is especially focused on organizations, which provide social services. The other one is aimed at education of small and medium enterprises. Its terms are however focused on support of business companies^{34/}.

^{34/} For example, one of selection criteria is increasing turnover rate, however the NGOs are non-profit and dependent on grants. Another selection criteria was increasing number of organization employees nevertheless the non-profit sector is typical for volunteer work or for high fluctuation caused by financial waves. These waves result from the dependence on donations and gifts.

Bulgaria: Under the OP Administrative capacity and OP Human resources there have been projects approved which aim to train and build capacity of the NGO sector. Unfortunately, some of the NGOs which won the bid are some so-called Go-NGOs – governmental NGOs, which mean NGOs created by people close to party leaders or state officials. This became clear after some NGOs, including ours, were invited to such training. When we asked for a programme or agenda of the training, nothing of the sort was given to us and, therefore, we refused to participate in such ‘capacity building’, the only aim of which was to justify funding.

Depending on the conditions of the different measures, NGOs can be partners with another NGO or an institution and they could submit a project together.

Under the OP Regional development there are no special calls for NGOs. Under the priority measure 3.3 Social and economic development – “From the people, to the people” – Support for the development of the civil society and the local communities. Under this measure, NGO projects are in the highest number of applicants.

Good practice example: Project of small NGO “World of Equal Rights” in Shumen town was supported from OP Administration Capacity resources. Training for other NGOs in the town and self-government delegates from the town and surrounding areas are paid from project resources. These NGOs and self-government delegates focus themselves on management, strategic planning and public relations. The project basis is transfer of know-how from foreign countries. That is why each topic is delivered by a tutor from abroad. The second objective was to gain particular contacts from abroad. This goes well due to the foreign tutors. One of the first project outputs is communication between municipality and NGOs and planned co-operation during preparation of a town development strategic plan. Involving the town in international projects is another output. These international projects will originate from the contacts, which the non-profit organization had arranged through the seminars. This makes the NGO an equal partner with the local self-government; a partner, who has something to offer. It is, however, an uncommon exception because the absolute majority of grants, which are focused on capacity-building, were assigned to so-called GO-NGOs (governmental NGOs).

Poland: ESF grants are focused on capacity-building. They are aimed e.g. at networking among non-profit organizations. A new call for proposals will be opened in the year 2009, including watchdog and monitoring activities.

Hungary: There were application possibilities called exclusively for the civil organizations within the Social Renewal OP, e.g. TAMOP 5.5.3./08/01 – Support of the organisations providing services and developing the civil society organiza-

tions; TAMOP 5.5.5./08/01 – Publicity for consumer protection by creating the conscious behaviour of consumers.

b) Final payments before the end of project realisation

Hungary: Some minor changes have been experienced in the practice of final payments in the last year (2008). Recently, a practice according to which the applicants receive the total sum of support during the period of realisation of the project is being introduced.

c) Bridging loans

Czech Republic: The Foundation for Civil Society Development in co-operation with ČSOB bank prepared programme called “Programme of bridging loans.” It is three-year programme of returnable foundation benefits in co-operation with a private bank. A returnable bridging loan from 5 000 euro to 60 000 euro up to 2 years will be provided to NGOs. These NGOs have to demonstrate support from public resources (donations), experience with administration of a project supported by EU, fulfill other terms and be willing to deposit a stated amount of money for refund of selected expenses. There is no similar system at ministerial and regional level. This system could be a possible solution. Credits for project pre-financing are exceptionally provided to non-profit organizations by some banks. It is based on the project realisation contract, which is signed with the Managing Authority. It is, however, not matter of fact according to our experience. In addition, banks require collateral either in the form of an organisation’s or an individual’s estate.

In other surveyed CEE countries no similar system had been introduced.

d) Global grants

Current regulations allow the operational programmes’ financial resources to be allocated in the form of a global grant^{35/}. A global grant is a financial amount detached from the operational programme. The Member State or the managing authority may entrust the management and implementation of a part of an operational programme to one or more “intermediate bodies”, designated by the Member State or the managing authority, including local authorities, regional development bodies or non-governmental organisations. The intermediary body is responsible for managing the global grant in the form of global projects. The lower total budget for global projects than for general

^{35/} Article 42 of General Regulation (1083/2006).

European projects could be one of the advantages for NGOs. The financial load during project realisation is as a result reduced. Eventually, the requirements for co-financing or pre-financing the project are not so high. The system of global grants was successfully undertaken during 2004–2006 period in the Czech Republic. It was a component of the Operational Programme for Human Resources Development and of Single Programming Document, Objective 3 in NUTS II Prague region.

Global grants were administered by the Foundation for Civil Society Development^{36/}. The aim of the allocation was support for the capacity-building of small non-profit organizations. Even though there is good experience with global grant realisation in the years 2004–2006^{37/} supported by current detailed studies^{38/}, a new system of global grants was not yet opened within Operational Programme Employment for the period, 2007–2013. The system is still in preparation stage within MoLSA. The social services of MoLSA undertook the preparation of particular global grant for social economy support. It enforced the integrated pilot global grant for social economy, which will be financed by the OP Employment (non-investment resources of ESF) and by the Integrated Operational Programme (IOP), (investment resources ERDF).

Recently, a system of global grants has been used by OP Education for Competitiveness in the Czech Republic. This system is, however, not aimed directly at non-profit organizations. Regional authorities are in the role of intermediary bodies. Although the minimal total budget threshold is quite low (min. 16 000 euro) and suitable for NGOs, the maximal budget 1 million euro and the other rules of the OP opened the possibilities also for strong organizations and applicants. Moreover, there is the interest of regional authorities to solve the system problems of the region. For these reasons, big projects of strong, professional organizations are preferred. Global grants in OP Education for Competitiveness have only the role to be managed by intermediary body at regional level. But the system lost sign of its main mission – to support small NGOs. These NGOs cannot manage the large projects, although they have the better know-how of detail on how local needs can be anticipated. The resolution of this problem lies in keeping the rules in favour of the NGOs – for example, to fix the maximal budget of the project low enough (for example, up to 20 000 euro).

^{36/} <http://www.nros.cz/programy-nros/globalni-granty>.

^{37/} The third sector, second chance. How the EU money help. NROS, 2007.

^{38/} The potential for utilising global grants in the Czech Republic in the 2007-2013 Structural Funds programming period. GLE, MPSV, 2006.

In Slovakia the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family considers the utilisation of grant schemes to solve selected problems, which arise during reduction of regional disparity in employment and social inclusion. These problems are solved within the Operational programme Employment and social inclusion.

In Romania the global grant system is not utilized recently. The NGOs are proposing to introduce the global grant system in the future.

In Poland global grant schemes have not been foreseen. However, funding for small-scale projects has been secured in various measures under OP Human Capital (financed from ESF), such as measures 6.3, 7.3, 9.5. targeted at local initiatives in the field of labour market, social integration and education.

In Bulgaria, 80% of NGOs – respondents in the survey answered that they do not know about global grants. The rest said that only some OPs use such grants.

In Hungary, there have not yet been so-called “global grants”, nor other types of low-amount funding that make it possible to support minor organizations or projects with a low budget. Experience from 2004–2006 showed us that there is need to create global grant system for NGOs. Recently, the non-profit organizations encountered problems caused by delays of project installments with high budgets. These findings – assembled by EAPN^{39/} Hungary – served as a basis for debate and negotiation with the government about global grants. On the basis of the information obtained from informal channels, some specialists consider that global or action grants are being prepared now but none of our interviewees have taken part in the preparation.

e) Administrative burden reduction

Czech Republic: The system of “indirect costs^{40/}” is utilized within the Operational Programme Employment, and in the OP Education for Competitiveness. This system allows the lump-sum inclusion of operating expenses into the total budget within the stated percentage range^{41/}. It completely reduces the problem of complicated accounting of administrative costs, copying huge number of bills (office material). There is no longer a need to record the operational

^{39/} European network against poverty.

^{40/} Following the Regulation (EC) No..../2006 on ESF. The article 11, 3c) allows to include “indirect costs” declared on a flat-rate basis, up to 20% of the direct costs of an operation to expenditures eligible for a contribution from the ESF, in accordance with national rules, including accountancy rules.

^{41/} This possibility results from the EK regulation for ESF for 2007–2013 period.

budget costs, which is a great advantage (but these mostly administratively costs stress:

- Office running costs, which often must be calculated in special way so that they correspond with project utilisation.
- The phone costs, where you have to record where and why, was called in circumstances with the project.
- Purchases of stationery.
- Salaries of technical staff of the project (accountant, assistant).

Simultaneously the OP Employment monitoring reporting system changed from three-monthly to six-monthly. Only two reports per year have to be submitted, when utilising the six-month's monitoring reporting system.

In Poland the indirect costs system is utilized in e.g. in projects financed from ESF under the OP Human Capital.

In Bulgaria indirect costs system is not integrated. The interviewed NGOs' representatives were not even aware of this option.

In Romania is used the system of indirect costs in project budget, however as follows from our survey, NGOs have not enough information about.

f) Technical assistance can help

In the Czech Republic the Association of NGOs CR in co-operation with Center for Community Organizing have entered an agreement with the Ministry of Regional Development, in January 2009. They have started to run seminars for NGOs in all regions in the **Czech Republic**, bringing information especially for NGOs as applicants. This activity is a good example of how the partnership can help, despite the fact that the negotiation of this agreement took more than one year, due to changes of staff in the ministry.

6. PARTNERSHIP – GOOD PRACTICE

This chapter of publication was not a part of SFteam research. It content examples of good partnerships, collected from the practice of the Center for Community Organizing (Czech Republic).

6.1. Partnership building support

Czech Republic: In the 2004–2006 programming period projects based on the partnership principle^{42/} were realized in each Czech region within the measure 3.3 of the Joint Regional Operational Programme (JROP). These projects were initiated by the Ministry for Regional Development as the Managing Authority of JROP. It was responsible for method development, for its monitoring and continuous methodical management in all regions. These projects differed from others by strict use of the partnership principle at the regional level, by education and by preparation for the new programming period.

Only regions could be projects' realisators. These regions should have shared the project and budget with other subjects, with partners, based on partnership agreement.

Both political representation in regions plus officers of regional authorities and some MRD officers had to acknowledge these measures. A great effort had to be made for this to happen. Since content and approach exceeded the usual measures of JROP and other OP: there was concern about non-investment projects of relatively significant financial amount (approximately 1,2 mil euro per region). These projects had seemingly “untouchable” results (especially education and information dissemination for support of absorption capacity).

These projects are special in emphasizing the partnership principle, which was a new term and an uncertain concept, and by demand for project management skills since the projects in different measures are above all defined by their outputs and results, not by pre-set procedures. A special feature was the involvement of non-profit organizations in the processes of preparation and approval of strategic regional development documents and in other activities, which resulted in administrative and regional absorption capacity-strengthening

Regions did not have “the same starting line”: Some of them utilised their own common experience (Vysočina, Olomoucký, Jihomoravský) and developed a vari-

^{42/} Evaluation of the measure 3.3 JROP. Final report. Tima Liberec, Evasco, CpKP central Moravia for MRD, 2008.

ety of conceptions with a number of activities, outputs and results (for example Královehradecký, Moravskoslezský). In other regions (Pardubický, Jihočeský, Zlínský) the start was slower, less clarified, confused and with greater difficulties. All regions, however, started their projects gradually in the year 2004. New partnership authorities were created, mostly as project managing teams. They are transparent enough and multi-sectoral. The public administration sector was however most evident. The project represented a great opportunity for non-governmental non-profit organizations of civil type (NGOs) and their regional associations. A typical problem for delegates of non-profit sector was lack of financial and human resources for full involvement in the regional project. It often happened that even though partners from particular sectors participated in the work of the managing team and realized a number of actions and made suggestions to analyses, strategic documents and to other regional activities, they did not, however, manage to go into details in their sector – to ensure the contact and permanent communication, to “activate” the sector and use measure JROP 3.3 to strengthen the regional development tasks of the non-profit sector.

A number of employees from regional authorities and elected regional delegates had derived ideas about the local non-profit sector mainly from knowledge of the organizations, which had requested support from regional grant programmes. The professionalism and assignment of non-profit sector delegates in partner authorities were, in some cases, a pleasant surprise. The impact of regional projects on the position and strengthening of non-profit sector capacities have been evaluated differently in each region. The position of non-profit sector has in some regions been maintained or strengthened. This non-profit sector then serves as a significant provider and confidential partner of the regional authorities and organizations of the entrepreneurial and of the state sector. The non-profit sector has “unhidden” (been revealed) as a viable partner in other regions. Only in some regions was the sector perceived as a necessary and enabling part of projects.

The regional authorities in some regions (Pardubice, Liberec and other) were assured that NGOs have a natural and high “potential for partnership and innovation” – tendency to co-operate, be flexible, to seek the opportunities, and to use the energy and motivation for innovation. This showed, for example, in the Pardubice region’s project, “Together!” The main focus of this project was to strengthen the NGOs’ capacity for joint co-operation. Project activities consisted in identification of project topics, preparation of the NGOs’ pilot partner projects, elaboration and verification of joint organization co-operation methods, building of partnership in the Pardubice region, realisation of work seminars and workshops. The total costs reached 1 572 220 CZK. One of the first results of

co-operation was the preparation of a project aimed at international co-operation within Operational Programme Employment. Three different projects were prepared in parallel. Ten NGOs from the Pardubice region were involved in project preparation. The non-profit organizations were able to utilise the partners' experience from management and public relations in social services because of this project. The partners come from England, Scotland, Germany and Slovakia.

6.2. Partnership in the rural area

We have some experience in the Czech Republic with partnership implementation in regional development. The best experience comes from the Local Action Group in the rural area and from the programme Leader. Programme Leader – we can also say “method Leader” – is a radical form of donation allocation for integrated rural development. The principle is to create a large Local Action Group (LAG), which creates its own strategic plan for future area development.

However, the international picture regarding the implementation of Leader is varied and the experiences with Leader 2004–06 and 2007–13 also differ. It is not the purpose of this publication to give a profound analysis and evaluation of the implementation of Leader in our countries.

In the Czech Republic it is generally an area of thirty or more municipalities, which are LAG members. The most important element of method leadership is thorough the application of the partnership principle, both in structure, and joint establishment of decision steps. The LAG has to be based on a partnership of public, private and non-profit sector. People working in different branches and institutions of public and private sector co-operate on partnership development. It creates a space for permanent information and experience exchange, encourages a natural learning process through the communication, increase in regional know-how, but also in the education of entrepreneurs, associations and delegates of public administration in the fields of project management and project financing. A new development strategy is formed based on long-term discussion of the LAG members and consultations with public. The opportunity to apply for a grant^{43/} could be a strong motivation to create a LAG and for strategic development. This grant could be used for the actualisation of the

^{43/} The donation is assigned from Leader programmes' resources. Programme Leader part of the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development. Czech Republic produced Programme of Rural Development for the years 2007–2013, which establishes the allotment of European money for rural and agricultural development. This programme was firstly started in 2004 within Enterprise partnership Leader.

strategy. The grants are then redistributed based on priorities and measures included in the strategic document. All subjects with their projects in the LAG area can apply for small grants.

Czech Republic:

There are currently 160 Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic. Eighty of them obtained a grant for their development.

Partnership development in the Hranicko region is demonstrated by a Local Action Group, which combines 31 communes and entrepreneurs, associations, local self-governments, individuals and farmers, who were bold and who were assisted with their activities and projects to achieve sustainable development principles. The sustainable development principles are contained in the strategic development of the Hranicko region. The impact on overall development (higher absolute value) is a result of their efforts and their ideas. The barrier “break-down” of traditionally divided sectors brought new and innovative ideas, which will increase the wealth of Hranicko. This collectively-created development strategic plan was subsidized from grant of Rural Development Programme. This Programme will be in place till the end of 2013. Up to 2,4 mil. euro can be invested into the region because of this Programme. Development Partnership announced the first call for submission projects in June 2008. Eleven of twenty-six submitted applications were selected by the Development Partnership Committee. Among them were projects, which were handed in by agricultural farms (for example, modernization of parlour technology), municipalities (for example trimming of public greenery in Opatovice, or an infrastructure for leisure time and sport in Skalice), or non-profit organizations (reconstruction of former boiler-room in house of culture to multi-functional studio for musicians) and entrepreneurs (From valuable waste material). 6 939 100 CZK were assigned for rural development of Hranicko region in this challenge round.

Hungary:

Projects in micro-region Zalaszentgrot are realized by non-profit organization, which is in co-operation with the municipality. These projects are aimed at local inhabitants. It managed to keep the young and educated people in the country through bringing into reality an educational project. These people then got jobs as project managers, which multiplied the benefits for this rural area thanks to successful completion of other projects. One interesting outcome was the formation of local centres to assist unemployed people, services for rural inhabitants in the form of bus routes or minibuses on-call. The project involving the building of an Ecological centre for rural development was no less interesting. The Eco-

logic centre is situated in the Dotk municipality, where only 30 inhabitants live. The basic idea of the centre was protection of nature and the environment along with the idea of permanently sustainable development, utilization of renewable sources of power and awareness-raising in an area of responsible consumption and permanently sustainable regional development.

Slovakia:

Civil association Friends of Earth – CEPA – in co-operation with municipalities of micro-region Podpolanie is developing a service centre in order to help the municipalities to benefit from EU funds. The Service centre will make use of Koordinacne zdruzenie Podpolanie, which brings together delegates of 16 municipalities and two towns of the micro-region. The association will manage the work of the Service centre. The CEPA association presented and handed in the feasibility study to mayors at the regional conference in December 2008. Preparation of the particular project has already begun in January 2009. Municipalities will compete for the support from the Structural Funds with help of this project. The project will also educate young people – graduates, women after maternity leave, who are unemployed in the micro-region. These people will be trained for the job of project managers and after vocational training will work for municipalities in the preparation and management of smaller projects.

6.3. Social Economy Projects

Social firms are a new model of education for disadvantaged people on the labour market. It is a type of social company. It carries out its business and, in addition, more than 50% of social company's incomes must be from sale of own products and services. It also has to employ 25% of healthy (or socially-) disadvantaged people and provides to its employees adequate working and psychosocial support.

The great challenge and opportunity in projects of social business is also co-operation with the community and the commune, where the social firms are established. Another challenge and opportunity is obtaining new customers and partners from the private sector, for example, increasing the concept of public responsibility in the private sector through the development of ethical approaches to business and trading.

Czech Republic:

The civil association, Fokus Prague, had already founded the first social firm in 1999. Juna's farm is a family hotel with a restaurant in Sedlec near Prague. There are 34 employees, 27 of them have particular needs. The social firm can

now employ another eleven people and so extend its services due to the extensive reconstruction, which achieved almost two-thirds of the goal. The reconstruction started in April 2007 and was subsidized from EU resources, the Czech Republic's state budget and its own resources. The project was realized within the operational programme, JROP. The total costs went up to 32 395 801 CZK. The property reconstruction enabled the association to make full use of partnership and involvement in commune life. The Juna's farm became a natural place for meetings of local clubs. Many people go to the restaurant for lunch. A new non-smoking hall and playground were opened recently. A place for public internet, which was missing in the municipality, was created. The sustainability of project outputs will be provided via professional services, which the farm provides (food, accommodation and conference centre facilities). The social firm can also provide catering. The laundry, which will be used by neighbouring big companies, is also part of the services provided. Some of the people with needs, who work at the Juna's farm, can now even live there. There are five new flats for ten clients. Based on the working experience, Fokus Prague decided to build another social firm "The Garden." It provides garden and maintenance services. Six people with learning difficulties currently work there.

Poland:

The Coalition for the Elimination of Social barriers (CESB) was formed for project realisation, and was supported within the EQUAL partnership, financed from the European Social Fund. It was formed to support joint action co-ordination of the public sector, the private sector, NGOs, educational institutions and the Church. The Coalition was founded during 2004–2005 and works based on a contract signed among the partners. It brings about collective projects on employment support and the integration of disordered and crippled and long-term unemployed people in the rural area. The coalition is settled in the Centre for social economics. Ideas of coalition and knowledge gained are put into practice by this Centre. A particular social firm was created in Jedlenice by the Coalition and with support from the Centre. The social firm was founded on parcel of land belonging to Association of friends of Crippled People. A marketing survey was done at the preparation stage of this project. It showed that the region mostly requires accommodation facilities. Therefore, it was decided to start a hotel business, which will be an asset to tourism. The handicapped people will also benefit from the new job opportunities. The property was reconstructed to become a small family hotel, where up to twenty handicapped people can work. The vocational training, which enabled them to work in the family hotel, was part of the project.

In co-operation with the association “Together ME-YOU-US”, the OPUS Centre supports the idea of social firms in the village community. These two organizations are brought about by a “Social economics partnership” project, which is aimed at support and the propagation of social economics in the Lodz region. The goal was to show that social economics is viable and that it is worthwhile to invest in it. The NGOs and associations belong to a set of social economics’ representatives, who enable the handicapped people to get a job and provide space for personal growth. Hardly anybody in the Lodz region knows what social business is. The insufficient support for social economics in the labour market on the part of public administration’s institutions is still the main issue. This propagation and support for social economics partnership will take place in thirty communes in the Lodz region. It will develop in each commune from local needs. Consultants will be available to advise and assist during the project. Their task will be the support for co-operation and problem-solving between public administration and other. The consultants will act on behalf of the respective groups.

Romania:

The non-profit sector in Romania just starts to orient itself in the social business field. The law permits in certain limits the non-profit organizations to carry business. A good example is Pentru Voi foundation, which works in Timisoara county since 1996. The Pentru Voi foundation also provides social services to mentally affected people and co-works in partnership with local self-government. It also runs protected workshops in which work up to 53 handicapped workers. They do for example copy works, goods assembling, and bakery. Besides this it also has mobile teams for greenery maintenance. These services are utilized and paid by partner firms, which signed the partnership contract with the Pentru Voi foundation.

7. ARGUMENTS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NGOs AND PUBLIC AUTHORITY

The participation of non-profit organizations in programming, management, monitoring and in EU funds control:

- 1.** Strengthens democracy and consensual policy culture. Enhances transparency and helps to overcome cheating and corruption. Supports the limited administrative capacity of public administration in this area.
- 2.** Assures more effective utilization of restricted public sources, results in quality enhancement of supported projects and in better absorption of funds.
- 3.** Supplies the independent expertise and helps to implement and ameliorate conditions, which should be taken into account: environmental protection, equality of women and men, social connection, needs of the handicapped, the way of life .
- 4.** Is conducive to real decentralization of EU funds, strengthens the feeling of public ownership supported projects and legitimacy of EU cohesion policy.

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9. INFORMATION ABOUT SFTEAM

Non-governmental organizations from SFteam network (SFteam for Sustainable Future) promote the frugal and purposeful utilization of Structural Funds for sustainable regional development. SFteam for sustainable future consists of eight non-governmental organizations from Central and Eastern European countries and of one from Netherlands. The network members are public society organizations. These organizations urge for sustainable society development. Their partnership is based on sharing of same goals and qualities. The purpose of their co-operation is the support of sustainable realisation of regional development policy in Central and Eastern European countries. To fulfill this task, the SFteam supports the incensement of non-governmental organizations' involvement into the regional development. The aim is to create the most effective partnership among public authorities and non-governmental organizations to utilize the structural funds effectively and transparently to fulfill the needs of the regional development in compliance with principles of sustainable development and public interest.

The majority of SFteam's financial resources come since 2002 from CS Mott Foundation and from Netherland's government. The CS Mott Foundation guaranteed the financial resources for our main activities till the June 2009. That is why we still seek a support for our intentions and work. At the beginning of the year 2008 we begin to cooperate with system of Croatian non-governmental organizations.

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Partner organizations

Center for Community Organizing, Czech Republic

www.cpkp.cz; www.cpkp.cz/regiony

BlueLink Information Network, Bulgaria

www.bluelink.net

Public Environmental Centre for sustainable development, Bulgaria

www.ecovarna.info

Focus Eco Centre, Romania

www.focuseco.ro

Friends of the Earth – CEPA, Slovakia

<http://www.priateliazeme.sk/cepa>

Green Liberty, Latvia

www.zb-zeme.lv

Milieukontakt International, Netherlands

<http://www.milieukontakt.nl/>

National Society of Conservationists, Hungary

www.mtus.hu

Polish Green Network, Poland

www.zielonasiiec.pl



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