A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. A blue pen is held in the foreground, partially obscuring the keyboard. The background is slightly blurred, showing a desk with papers and a laptop screen. The overall tone is professional and focused.

## Civil society, old media, and cyberspace - too much talk, but no communication?

Is it easier to have a mission than to have a message? Why is it so hard for NGOs to **formulate effective messages** and speak the same language as their audience? Is **virtual communication** killing messages and blurring responsibility - and in the end with so many **diverse platforms**, why are our messages getting lost? A crucial point for the survival of civil society is to turn "NGO speak" into effective communication!

**Moderator Petko Georgiev:** I want to start with just a few basic issues that I see as key in terms of the relationships between the NGOs and the media. The title of this discussion is created after a song of the Bingo Boys, that you might remember – it was a hit a couple of years ago – Too much talk and no communication. Well I think this is the situation that many of the NGOs are.



A lot of talking - little communication

If you look at what they do, they are talking a lot – they have websites, they publish reports, they meet at conferences, they have their internet places where they communicate with each other. So there is a lot of talk going on. But my impression - and I think that many of you might share this - it is that there is really very little communication. There is very little that reaches a wider audience outside those closed circles, those shared micro spaces where NGO people communicate. So I would think this is one of the major problems or issues that need to be addressed.

Expanding platforms

Another observation as a starting point for this discussion, we have seen in the last ten years a real revolution in the area of communication, mobile phones, the internet. They have changed the world beyond any kind of imagination. I guess most of us cannot imagine working and living without an email and without the cell phone. So the platforms for communication have expanded and they are no longer limited to specific people but accessible for anybody. We don't have the excuse of the limited space we had ten years ago, when everybody could say, well we got all these great ideas and the national media is so controlled and commercialized and so on, they don't want to listen to us. No! No more excuses. The space for communication is more open than ever and it's becoming even more open. So if we are looking for reason why are communications going nowhere we should start looking into our own way of communicating first?

An ocean of information that lacks objectivity

Technology has, as always, gone before imagination of people how to best use it. We've been hoping very much that the internet and the communication revolution gadgets that we have today will expand outreach and contribute to more and freer access to information. Instead of that, we have received an ocean of information that lacks objectivity. We have sacrificed our own private space and privacy because of those communication means and at the same time we are limited and don't participate in that wide share of information space. My opinion is that societies are getting more and more fragmented and people prefer to communicate only with those who are like them. So more or less whoever you put as a friend on Myspace are the people you want to talk to. The rest we don't care about, and they don't care about you. I think that's a problem. Social networks eventually expanded our way to reach people that we consider part of our own circle but have grossly limited our ability and our time and motivation to reach out to other people.

Another question is about the content of internet communication. Is it a blessing as most of us thought it might be, the freedom we have to express ourselves and reach unlimited amounts of people? Or is it a curse because anybody can publish anything? And you have no way of knowing if it's true or not, you have no way of knowing whether it's verified. Once you read something on the internet you have to do your own research to find out if the text has anything to do with the reality. So this is a new dilemma of irresponsibility versus freedom in communication. Just a few years ago we were dealing with censorship and

limited access to the media and now we have another issue – unlimited access to communication and the responsibility issue of what is published the content of forums chat rooms and so on. Anybody is free to publish whatever they like and of course they are not aware that big brother is actually watching them and people have ways of finding out who has written what.

You don't  
have to be  
representative  
you have to  
have a message

Finally I would like to say that effective communication - and I am talking now from the perspective of NGOs - effective communication has nothing to do with how much an NGO is representative. To be effective in communication you don't have to be representative for anybody, Coca Cola Light does not represent anybody but yet they found an excellent way to communicate their message and become popular. You have to have a message and you have to know how to communicate that message, these are the basic issues, it's not about being representative. This is a problem as well, because people who are only representing themselves are generally more effective in communication than very well organized groups of people. Now time for your comments

**Participant (P):** It's striking for me how much energy communication requires and I am asking myself how much energy am I ready to put into communicating.

**P:** I think that even if we are lost in this ocean of information we still cannot ignore things like Facebook, Twitter etc. and try to use it for the best means or purposes.

**P:** I am amazed with the tech revolution we are living in and the world that's changing every day. I am interested in manipulation. I try to ignore Twitter and Facebook, but it's like a few years ago we tried to ignore cell phones, but I think I will have to try to use it.

**P:** Another problem is the interest of the audience, probably because there's not enough time to invest, the [NGO] shows are boring and nobody watches them.

**P:** That it's about inability it's not about time.

**Aggressive attitude online** **P:** I am kind of afraid of the aggressive attitude [of anonymous comments online], so I don't read comments to my articles. I was told that I have to reply because if I don't get the feedback, I will not know what I would like to talk about here. [I feel that media] accept me more as an individual, as an expert than as someone who's representing the movement. And even though I used the background knowledge of the movement the environmental NGOs and international networks, they [the media] don't want me to represent anybody.

**Mod:** The internet can help with providing a tool for transparency for NGOs, but you have to learn the rules, because there are different rules for the online world. First of all you cannot choose your audience – you never know who reads your stories. This is why you have to adapt.

**P:** We are struggling with the [problem] how to present very complicated legal issues in a relatively simple manner. Like freedom of expression versus the dignity of individuals or crime prevention versus defendant's rights - these are very dif-

**How to present complicated legal issues in a simple manner?**

difficult delicate issues this is problem A. Problem B is that our main target groups are not too sexy from the point of view of the public, how can we convince the majority society that marginalized groups' problems are real problems which concern them without being populist?

**NGOs as a news source**

**Mod:** I think it is important to see how journalists consider NGOs as news source. If the content provided by an NGO is not newsworthy, then it has difficulty to reach mainstream media and be in the news. Probably we have to differentiate between the general presence of an NGO on the internet and content / campaigns. Also we need to understand how media works, probably that's how NGOs can improve their presence and acceptance in the media.



**P:** [Communication] is a gateway to philanthropy, participation, volunteerism, everything that makes the people understand why NGOs are there and what are they doing. We face really heavy obstacles on how to present the idea of civil society organizations, how to work with journalists to transmit these kind of ideas - how not only to have a message but get the message heard by the public. How to choose the channels and how to use them in a proper way.

**P:** If you look at the top Twitter profiles in the country or worldwide it's not people with causes that are the most effective communicators, it's often people who are advertising themselves. This is a big challenge.

**Don't need to reinvent the wheel**

**P:** We don't need to reinvent the wheel. There is so much already out there that can be used – we don't need to reinvent a new Facebook or Twitter, but make applications and RSS feeds and work on [what is already there].

**P:** If you bring a message you also have to bring ideology and that's what all the NGOs are discussing about. E.g. it is really hard for the media to get the right numbers on human trafficking in let's say Eastern Europe, getting [NGOs working on these issues] together and providing the media with real actual numbers would be the right way to combine NGOs and NPOs with the media.

**Media is captured by businesses**

**P:** I would like to share the difficulties that we face in our work with the media, which is many times captured, not anymore by politics, but by businesses who are controlled and well linked with politicians. This is many times shutting the voices of civil society on very important issues.

**Communication helps create lacking constituencies**

**P:** Communication helps civil society to create constituencies and this is something that is lacking both vertically among NGOs and between civil society and the people.

**P:** Evil forces can use the same tools for exactly the opposite purposes.

**If you are not on the internet you dont exist**

**P:** If you are not on the internet you do not exist, if you ignore the internet someone will fill it with content anyway and you will be absent. You have to do it – there is no choice.

**Mod:** I'll give you an example. If I am doing a story on human trafficking which we do from time to time in the program that I produce I would turn to a couple of very professional NGOs in that sphere in Bulgaria to give me the data, to give me opinion. They are newsworthy for me, because I know they have the

**Journalists need experts in their address book**

expertise. And I don't see any problem in that, journalists operate in a very simple manner. We have an address book and e.g. with regards to crime each of us has four or five names tops. When there is a story concerning crime we call those people, we don't start searching for new sources but usually call the sources that we already have. Only if those sources are not sufficient for our work we would start to search for new names. So if I am an NGO - I try to put my name on the address book of those journalists that are writing about my problems. Once I am in their phone book I am represented in the media. It's really very simple. Media will call me once and if they find me interesting they'll keep calling me, if they don't find me interesting they will never call me again.

**P:** I have the feeling it's not the media's first interest to raise awareness but to have a certain action and a certain point. In this very fast living world we just have time to care about one thing.

**P:** I think it's important to be present on the web because when journalists need a cover story they search the web first. I have an example of a Hungarian who used to write a blog in English explaining politics in Hungary. He would publish it once a week, he wouldn't have very high amount of readers but every now and then he had foreign journalists talking to him because he was the easiest one to find online. He was the first person they would talk to and he would tell them where to look for more information and whom to ask further. So in a way he was on a shared telephone / email list of all journalists in the world by being present on the web.

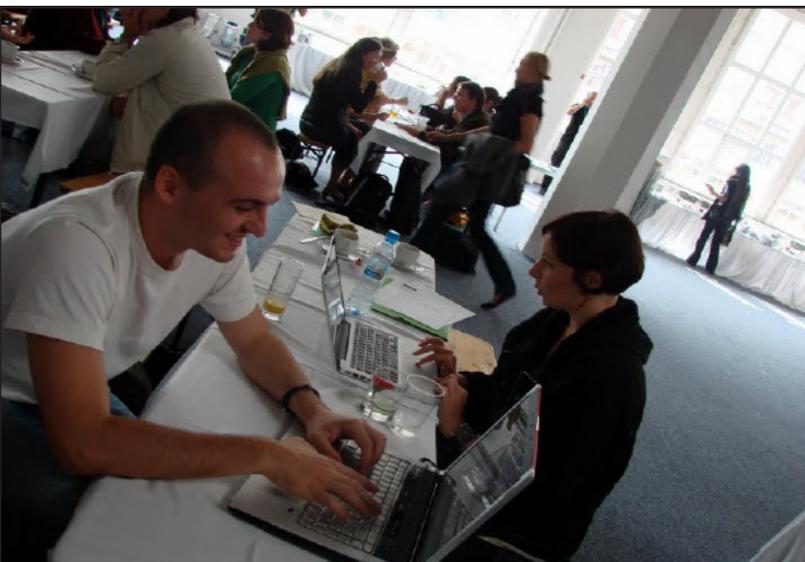
**Positioning**

**Mod:** It is about positioning yourself. I know it's a marketing thing but it has to be applied. This guy has positioned himself perfectly to be the contact point of people outside Hungary who are interested in current developments.

**P:** I think there is a change in the conception of what journalism is and what's news production. You may produce professional production however most websites nowadays have a place where you can watch videos - everything is published on the internet and internet users can choose what they like to see, compared to what is shown on TV.

**Generation gap**

**P:** I think that there is a very clear generation gap; I don't think many people under 20 watch TV these days. And I don't think many people over 40 read the internet daily. So we have two parallel worlds: in the kitchen and in the dining room you have two people living in the world of TV and the next room their kids are living in a different environment - the internet. And they don't really overlap that much.



**Mod:** NGO representation on the internet. As a journalist I have a huge problem with this. Open any NGO site, it has some information about the organization and it's full of success stories. Success stories and contact information. Neither of this works for a journalist. As

**Success stories and contact information, none of this works for a journalist**

a reader but also as a journalist I have learned not to believe everything that is written on an institutional or NGO website. This is a problem for NGOs. Have you ever heard of a project that has failed? We started this project but we messed it up, it didn't turn out well. No, every project is a bigger or a smaller success story. If you read the internet it is full of success stories of projects that are dead and forgotten a long time ago - what do you do with that?

**An interactive blog can create interesting communication**

**P:** A potential solution for this can be a blog where we accept all comments. On our organizational blog we have very interesting communication between potential beneficiaries and the foundation, as well as new ideas for our project.

**Mod:** NGOs that open their projects to free and open public evaluation that's innovation.

**No technical language, rather images photos and engaging messages**

**P:** There are some rules here too however, e.g. do not blog texts with technical NGO language on your website! Just use short paragraphs, images, photos of your project and send engaging messages: how can you as my viewer help me as an NGO or how can you get involved in our actions: as a volunteer, as a donor, anything. It has to be engaging. [Instead of] only providing success stories you could also tag and have hyperlinks that connect you to other sites. This can bring not only the success stories but also the sad stories and the reasons why you work for this – this can be done by good tagging. Google's doing it and it's a way of future public pressure, a new skill: search engine optimization and tagging.

**P:** It's free, anybody can tag themselves into Wikipedia.

**P:** It's a whole science; there are companies that make living out of it. It is much more complicated.

**Opening a shop on a side street**

**P:** Putting everything in your NGO language as someone said on your website it's like opening a shop on a side street in a suburb, while actually you want to be center square of the city. Go where the main action is on the internet, make sure you have articles on the issue you work about on Wikipedia, that it's up-to-date and has all available information there, maybe linked to your reports. Think of a way you can use YouTube. The second most popular search engine on the web after Google is YouTube. People like to watch things. Forget your website. It should be there but it's not that important, what's important is that the message is available where people go.

**Mod:** Most of civil society by default wants to influence public opinion and through that have an impact on public policy as well. Public opinion is still, and will be in the few years to come, formed through the mainstream media. How can civil society and NGOs work better with mainstream media? Why is it so difficult for NGOs to produce news stories and understand how to put their content where it really matters? Ok, Google has a worldwide audience of billions but if you want to influence a specific public policy decision in your country, what you really need is the headline news of your national TV. Google may help but it won't do the trick.

**P:** I think that it's not a matter of not knowing how the media works, because I think that it's fairly easy to understand, NGOs are now more and more employ-

ing people that have a media background to work as press officers or media experts or even media consultants.

Good news  
doesn't count

**P:** The NGOs that are able to attract media attention are the ones that fight human rights, freedom of expression or they do very provocative actions - for example Greenpeace, Amnesty international, Human Rights Watch. Good news from NGOs doesn't count.

There is  
news and  
no news

**Mod:** I personally think that the media does not operate in the categories of good and bad news - there is news and no news. I will give you an example. If the government increases the pension by 10% I think every national newspaper and TV will start with that story if there hasn't been a major earthquake that same day or something like that. It's a positive thing to have pensions going up by 10% and the media will not discriminate against that news because it's positive. It's not about good or bad, it's about promoting stories that concern people. They will start with the pension story because it concerns a vast majority of the population. Even if the media doesn't formulate it that way, they prioritize their stories according to what part of the audience the particular story concerns, and whether it a forms of novelty or threat to that part of the audience. It is much more difficult but there is a technique of promoting positive stories.

Bad news  
are catchy  
it looks  
dramatic

**P:** Can I disagree with you? Another example however, from Budapest, Hungary: about 200 people set the TV building on fire - it was on the news for weeks. When 50 people blocked a bridge it was again in news for weeks. But when 600 people on bicycles demonstrate peacefully twice a year, there is just a small mentioning on the 10th page [of a newspaper]. Bad news is catchy, a building on fire - it looks dramatic. A bunch of people demonstrating peacefully it's not catchy.

Skip NGO  
vocabulary  
real people  
and stories  
are better

**P:** Just an idea how to sell your NGO story to the media: sadly journalists often work on the minimum effort into a story, basically if they are going to a press conference they publish the written material they were given. You should be prepared for this - and not with the NGO vocabulary - pick up a person, because an NGO benefits from working with real people e.g. with unprivileged kids. For a journalist it's not that easy to come into contact with this kind of person and if you work with them and say you have contact (of course if they are willing to cooperate) this can be something that links you to the media. Making a personal story is always easier to show than just numbers and stuff.

**Mod:** I think it's very logical for NGOs to distribute their messages through individual human stories. NGOs are supposed to be working with real people so why do they need to talk the language of statistics? Media is more and more looking into individual stories when they want to present a certain piece of news, and a good news story will always start with the particular person's story and then go on to the facts. So if an NGO helps a reporter to find out the personal story that will help him or her do better TV or newspaper stories - this will help the NGO get their message through. Work more with personal individual stories!

**P:** Another thing that could help NGOs to get their message to the wide public is to use their business partner. It doesn't matter if it for a specific project or a general partner - but someone who knows you. Business people are usually more



skilled to communicate with media and promote their products - so these people could really help us to get the message through and by using their contacts mainly (it's all about using contacts and phonebooks).

**P:** It may be good for NGOs to adopt some of those marketing skills from the corporate sector.

**Use marketing skills of the corporate sector**

For example the cigarette producers - you see what kind of stuff they are able to promote, it's bad for your health, it's killing your kids, its full of poison... And still they are very good at promoting it. We NGOs are supposed to be promoting things that are of value to citizens, so if we were able to use the same skills, even if we don't have the same budgets, we can use the same skills, there is no reason why that shouldn't work.

**Decline of traditional media**

**Mod:** Will there be journalists in 20 years? Is there a need for journalists?

**P:** I think there will be space for journalists in 20 years, but it will look very different. The decline of traditional media is a fairly hot story of the past few years. One of the things we [were thinking] initially is that with the internet there [will be]no need for media outlets because anyone can publish anything. However now we start to realize that that's exactly the point. If anyone can publish anything there is actually still a strong need for somebody to build up credibility, someone who you can trust. Someone needs to look at every day and curate the news for you, so, at least in my mind, there is no question that there will be journalists in the future. What kinds of news outlets they will be working for is a whole other issue. Someone spoke about YouTube; the strength of the media on the internet today is that they can merge various things , written content side by side with video content, even with chat functions, etc. and this is the type of stuff that you cannot do with the traditional media.

**Mod:** So there will be a need for journalists in a different technological environment but in the same functional role.

**P:** Ultimately I would say yes. As a journalist you have to deal with the various formats, probably you have to have one person as TV crew, radio crew etc, but someone needs to follow and make sense of the news.

**How can we build public pressure?**

**P:** How can be we build public pressure in 20 years? This is interesting because its the overlapping part between media and NPOs – publics pressure.

**P:** I don't think the professional field [of journalism] will die, even if citizen journalism content can be of good quality, in most cases it's not. And it's very personal, it's not always in the public interest.

**Mod:** If you want to look forward it's always interesting to look a little bit backwards. Remember what the situation was just 15 years ago: one public state channel TV, just a few newspapers in this part of the world, all of them controlled by the state. Also in Western Europe the situation was similar: public TV, maybe with two channels, public radio maybe with two or three channels. Those who remember those times, we hoped that once that monopoly's broken and we have more private and commercial channels, all of a sudden there will be a much bigger choice or variety of programs that you can watch . It will be a much better and freer media environment. Now I find myself surfing the channels, I have 65 of them at home, with digital platforms you probably have hundreds of them, I surf through the channels and very rarely I can find something worth watching. Technology may provide you with millions of channels and terabits of content on the internet, but it will not necessarily provide you with something interesting to watch, something worthy of listening to or reading. So let me phrase another question: how are NGOs and civil society participating in the creation of quality content which is worth watching?

How are NGOs and civil society participating in the creation of quality content which is worth watching?

**P:** About journalists as curators, this is a very difficult question and one of the great things that internet communication has done has been to reduce the power of the information gate keepers. This is crucial at the moment. Then there's the question of responsibility for the content. Two examples: a travel guide book from the last century - a very responsible travel guide talking about Egypt and the Egyptians, and it said Egyptians do not wash; they have a low sense of morality, etc. etc. This was content, which had been through all the committees and approved to be published. Another example is the scientific consensus in the 1970s that animals are unable to feel emotions. This conclusion was managed by peer reviews and as no scientific information suggested the contrary, it was allowed to be published in scientific literature. This was [back then] supposedly responsible control of information – but in fact it was totally wrong. I think that the strength of internet is about choice, and not having one outlet curating the news. There is value in the vastness of information.

Responsible control of information is relative

**P:** About the future, I think TV will die and I think that news will be paid for. In a world with so much information, you will have to pay for it in order to get the relevant one. I am pretty sure about this.

**P:** I think we are not first people debating the future of the media. When radio was invented people were afraid that human kind will forget about reading books. When TV was invented they thought this is the end of radio. I don't think TV will ever die because the average person does not have the time and the resources or the motivation to search for news and to search for content. There will always be some technical tools call it a TV station, a program director or a multimedia portal which will be digesting content for you. People are busy, they have full lives and they are getting busier and busier and have less and less time. If you are a doctor or some other professional you need to hear what's going on around you, but you don't have the time to search on the internet all day. You still need someone to digest and to give you the essential part of what's going on. And who is that guy - is it a blogger who is responsible only

TV will die, news will be bought

for his own values and ethics, or is it a news organization, maybe different from today's news organizations, but who anyways follows some kind of professional code of conduct and knows when something can be promoted as verified news, who can differentiate between news and opinion and feel obliged to give a balanced view of the different opinions. If this dies I think society will lose something very important because we'll go back to the time of party newspapers. News won't matter because you will always find something to support your thesis. If you don't find something to support your thesis, you always have a shoe to take off and throw at somebody.

**Mod:** What should civil society and NGOs do in practice in the next years to improve, I think we have a consensus that they need to do something.

**Form is gathering importance**

**P:** I think one of the things that is happening to media presentation is that the form becomes more and more important. Everything needs to look pretty and it needs to be short because people don't take time. This leaves much more for reporters to do, much more time is needed to deal with the background information, take out just the short important parts, be representative of both sides and not biased and so on. If there is a specific topic that an NGO covers, they could really help out - because it's their field they know the stuff and can probably do some of the work.

**P:** Can NGOs change the media? The problem is, even if the message is the right one, the presentation in the media is not always correct. E.g. a journalist may ask: why are there so many NGOs, doesn't this weaken them and prove them useless? If this is the first question, our task is to teach journalists. Probably with a university course. There is major lack of understanding about NGOs and civil society.

**Mod:** I understand but I don't agree. Civil society and NGOs are even less popular than governments and if NGOs don't trust the media please believe me the media don't trust NGOs - and with good reason. I don't think NGOs should at all try to put educating the media on the agenda. It's an impossible task - the media are what they are. We must learn to use them and work with them as they are, this is a major principle of PR. If you haven't been heard, it's your problem that you haven't been heard, it's never the problem of the recipient. You have to be able to choose the right wording, the right time, the right environment, the right media, the right carrier of your message in order to be heard. You can't change the media. Efforts like this have been done. So many NGOs, so many donors have funded their own media outlets or taken a media outlet and funded it for years and years placing their messages without any complaints because they are paying the bill and everything they want gets published. The result is less than zero. Such publications lack credibility with the public, it's not the solution to re-educate the media, "let's teach them about NGOs, let's teach them about civil society". No. They are what they are.

**Educating the media is an impossible task**

**P:** We as civil society organizations are in disadvantaged position because many before us and many around us have destroyed the image of NGOs. We are seen by the media as project-driven, donor-driven, closed society organizations if you listen to the worst side of it which exist out there. When you



talk about a good initiative that your NGO has carried out it's only logical and professional for a reporter to ask you well how much did this website cost, and who paid the money? And if a website costs ten times more than what it usually costs on the free market, which is often the case the NGOs, then society and the readers have a good reason to ask why is this? How did you choose the company? It may seem very petty in your eyes because you've done an excellent job and it's a great website and many people have worked so hard, but from the perspective of the media there are other issues which are big concerns. As somebody who is actively involved in institutional non-corporate PR I think it's impossible, don't try to put it on the agenda to educate the media. It just won't happen.

How many people have the guts to stand up and start talking?

**P:** When NGOs are talking about why journalists don't understand them, why donors do not understand them, why company leaders do not understand them, why the neighbors do not understand them, it is just because there is such a small overlap between society and NGOs. I honestly think it is useless for NGOs to expect that the media would do something, or for journalists to expect something from NGOs. What I would expect from us as NGOs is to stand up and start talking; how many people have the guts to stand up and start talking in the NGO sector?

**Mod:** To summarize: talk more. Be braver and proactive in communication. Don't stay on the safe side. Avoid NGO and institutional jargon.

NGOs shouldn't have to stay on the safe side

**P:** I hate when people start, it usually happens in Brussels, commenting something on a panel with: well to stay on the safe side I would like to say that... Maybe someone working in Brussels have to stand on the safe side, but we as NGOs and media should stay on the other, we should be more bold in what we do.

Train media regulatory and ethics commissions

**P:** About trying to educate journalists, we've had a bitter experience with that as well. I think what NGOs can do - and are obliged to do - is to train media regulatory commissions and media ethics commissions. An example from Bulgaria [is], where the bulk of the mainstream media violate their own code of ethics, which they themselves created and signed, on a daily basis and the press and the broadcast media commissions have done absolutely nothing about it.

**Mod:** Very good idea. Work more proactively with the self-regulatory bodies of the media when there are violations of the values that NGOs are protecting. Because these regulatory bodies often only react when they have been officially addressed by somebody. It's good to write letters to those regulatory or self regulatory bodies about issues that you see in the media, and they can react.

**P:** I would like to tell you about a project that been going on in Poland for several years. It's a web based platform called ngo.pl and it's an NGO portal. It's tailored information for NGOs but also for wider public and there are civic journalists, professional journalists working outside mainstream media who work for the portal. There you can find information about interesting projects, interesting results of projects, many success stories, great projects that people do every day not only from Poland, but from different countries all over the world. I think this is an added value. It's not to replace mainstream media, but as NGOs very often cannot reach out with their messages, they can tell their story to the civic

Interactive and informative NGO platforms are useful

journalist and this person would cover the story and people can read articles and add something. It has a forum, it's very interactive. This is also a very good resource for the media and through this portal you can find experts in different fields, experts from NGOs - it works very well and it could be replicated in different countries I think.

The risk is that it becomes a closed circle for NGOs

**P:** Yes there is a platform and I am a user of this platform as well, but the great danger with something like this, is that it becomes a closed circle for NGOs. It has a lot of different interesting information, but it's written only for us. I am quite sure there is not a lot of people from outside of the sector who are interested in writing or reading the information on this site. It's a great difficulty to become a platform not only for NGOs, but make it attractive also for people from outside.

More interactive media and more listening to viewers

**P:** What I think NGOs can do in the future is to try and reach out to the public, try to be more direct, for example use modern technology. We see new things coming up, for example you have this information channel TV channel and there are viewers sending pictures and MMS - we could do the same, ask the viewers, listeners or readers on the portal to come up with a story, give us information and we will give it to the media.

NGOs don't have the patent of truth

**P:** NGO should talk more but also, as just mentioned - also listen more. Listen to the public. I think the problem is that NGOs think that they have a patent for truth and everybody should listen to them, however this is not true all the time. If we are more open and use all this new technology to listen to the public and ask the people, do surveys asking the people on the streets what do you think about this new idea or this project? Then we can do it better - and then media may listen to us.

Not working with media may undermine your work

**Mod:** You mention that the NGOs don't have the time to work with the media and with the public. I think this is something that a highly specialized NGO can afford, if they are running a hospice or providing another social service they don't need to communicate with the media that much. But if an NGO is active in a policy area and it is policy oriented: research, human rights, environment - not finding time to work with the media means undermining your own work. The product of an NGO is not a perfect report on an excellent website, the final product we are looking for is a changed policy. Even the best report won't change anybody's policy if people don't hear about it, if they don't learn about it, if they don't debate it. Not working with the media for an NGO that has any policy agenda is like committing suicide, it's spending money to no avail. Working with the media, drafting a media strategy and implementing it should come before drafting a report. Because that's the whole point!

Any NGOs that need to talk to the media, be creative!

