



FocusGroups

During spring of 2009 focus groups were organized in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. In each country 2 parallel discussions of approximately 3 hours were organized, with various types of active and engaged people:

Group 1 – practitioners of organized civil society, including representatives of: Think-thanks, service providers, watch-dog organizations, human rights organizations, members' organization (municipalities associations), consultants', trainers' and employer's organization.

Group 2 – individual activists and thinkers not formally organized, including Volunteers, bloggers, individual activists, intellectuals, media representatives and defenders of specific causes

The topic of discussion was **what is civil society - its role, function and future?** Discussions were recorded and took place in neutral places outside the CEE Trust offices.

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What definition would you give to civil society and civic activism?

Internet activism
Spontaneous networking
Restructuring civil society
Enthusiasm



(summary made by facilitator)

Group 1

[While discussing what civil society is] the internet protests were not considered and, furthermore, the protests [in Sofia in early 2009] were not commented at all! Some of the attendants gave negative evaluations for the young as they were said to be living in a virtual world – “they believe things work out as they do on the Internet – you just click on and it happens – but things are much more complicated in real life”

Group 2

For these young people who were not sent forward by an organization, but were volunteers and bloggers, their civil activity is spontaneous and a matter of personal choice. They do not think of money or projects but rather defend their own causes or do it [engage] to solve a personal problem. They want to demonstrate their own stand in the blog, or they simply state “I do it because I like it”. Everyone’s leitmotif was “I do it for my own sake, not for somebody else’s”, there was no awareness either of a common cause or of articulation of a general priority problem.

This is individual, or some of them define it even as rather selfish, activism: everyone has a problem, a cause or desire; and everyone is also looking for people who have a similar problem, cause, desire, or hobby. None of them is willing to represent somebody else, everyone is (re-) presenting themselves. The “organization” principle is based on the belief in looking for one’s own kind, those having a similar problem, desire, cause.

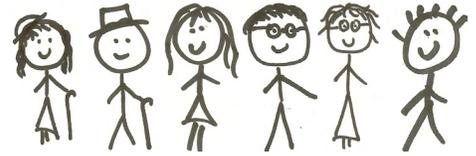
The Internet is the perfect place for finding people of “one’s own kind”, for recognizing and acknowledging those having a similar problem, hobby, cause, etc. Thus this individual activism grows into web activism, but it also turns into creating a network of one’s own kind – networking. The Web both connects and distinguished between different groups, but it also provides a sense of something huge.

The word “we” does exist, i.e. there is a civil society indication, an awareness that civil society appears in Bulgaria through them. The belonging to the civil society is not generational – once you are in the Web, age is of no relevance. Civil society is defined as a quest for “involvement” Civil society is refers to the awareness of the fact that you are not alone but dependent on other people”; “team work”; “civil society is a matter of upbringing, of culture development”; “creating an environment that makes you feel normal, something like a sanctuary that grows bigger and bigger”. However, it is exactly because everyone starts off from their own problem, from themselves, that the groups are different and have different problems; it is difficult to formulate a common problem

Both Groups

Both groups hint at the conclusion that currently it is not self-evident what the term “civil society” refers to. Also, it becomes clear that some restructuring processes are going on, both of the socially significant public space concept and the civil participation manners. There is some transition from the civil society concept of a “third sector” to some more plastic and dynamic forms of civil activism. The latter can be defined as individual-network civil activism which is searching for new institutionalizing forms. The significance of expert civil activity increases, not only as institutionalized think-tanks but civilly engaged experts as well. Current evolving processes should be discussed and considered and it is important that both “generations” should listen to each other’s opinions and exchange wisdom for enthusiasm.

Party politics
Local level
Control function
Prohibition to distribute profit
Global consciousness



(transcripts of discussion)

Group 1

P 2: As I see, a democracy is vivid and real if party politics is part of the civil society. As Tamás Gáspár Miklós said „the most typical civil organization is a political party”. You can see how colorful the US presidential campaigning was, the coalitions include trade unions, lobby groups, religious and civil groups. In Hungary, these groups incorporated into the political parties and there is no direct feedback between the party politics and self-organized groups. Although there are different possibilities to participate in the law making or other issues, real results can be achieved if a local group – with sufficient aggression - demands it. However, as I see different parliamentary groups „simulate” this cooperation and create party related organizations as financial process machines. I think that the „bottom-up” type initiations, which exist in the western democracies, do not exist in Hungary. We cannot say that only the party politics is guilty, they are from this society. The situation is that this game was approved by those who appeared as NGO leaders in the early 90s. So, it is true that the political elite is corrupt and estranged but on the other hand those who tend to be members of self-organized groups went back to the depoliticized status that was typical for the groups in the 80s. They accepted that „we are independent from the politics thus we should avoid to be involved into the politics”. We can see the result now.

P 5: I have a different point of view. If we talk about civil society as civil organizations, we can say that the civil sector has its own elite. It became very internal, I think.

Mod: I think local relations are very important. Are the local government representatives open enough; is there real dialogue between local societies, communities and the legitimate representatives of the local governments?

P 5: It is a bad moment to talk about this because the whole political system is not credible. It is true in local level as well what P 2 said: local self-organized groups have not real possibilities to be involved into the decision-making processes.

P 3: I think it is true that civil organizations have control functions but I think their service provider function also important. In this meaning I do not feel that civil organizations are marginalized because many of them provide important services. (for gypsies, for youth, etc.) I think it is a little bit artificial to say that if somebody does not control the power it is marginalized.

P 2: Yes, this language is what I meant before. I do not care to have the „NGO sector” as part of the economy, I think it is manipulation because civil society is vivid and real only if it can control the power and state. If we talk about how weak this control function is, it can always be said that civil society plays a service provider function and there are organizations which collect donations, run schools, etc. I think these tricks can maintain the de-politization.

P 5: In most of the cases these distinctions are not valid because the organizations have different, parallel functions.

P 4: It is a very difficult story. The globalization, the information boom, the Internet made the process more difficult. It was very interesting to listen to the conversation about the US assistance [of civil society], the training method (participatory learning) for example is a typical Anglo-Saxon one; it came from the British workers’ trainings. We completely left our traditions, I am sure that we know more about US civil society than the European one. Who knows anything about the British, Norwegian or Danish civil society? While it is very important that when we talk about local issues we cannot compare them to international issues, these are tiny local problems, local communities, and it would be important to see how we could identify and solve those problems.

Mod: I think the service provider role is a very important one, and there are many of services that would not be provided without the activities of the NGOs. The problem is that service provider role is entwined with the political role because for example in the case of a social problem, an NGO cannot criticize the state or local government because its financing will be uncertain. These organizations are so defenseless that they cannot provide their professional services safely. It is because they cannot focus on the sources of the problems in many cases because if they do it they would have conflict with the governmental partners. So, I can see the political defenselessness in this area as well.

P 2: You have not understood me. I do not say that Hungarian NGOs can be put into two separate groups as service providers or public policy oriented ones. I know that very often the organizations fulfill both roles. But we have to decide what the topic of our discussion is. We can talk about the nonprofit sector and then these questions are relevant, but if we speak about societal self-organization – civil society – and ability of the Hungarian citizens to control the executive power, or even how they can influence different common decision-making processes - these are two separate discussions.

Group 2

P 3: In my understanding the category „nonprofit” is first of all an organizational-legal category, at the same time referring to a definite way of organizing finances. The term „volunteer” is first of all a category for the individual – meaning that a person is doing something regularly for his/her community (local, professional, etc.) for free, without expecting payment for these activities. The „civil” category is the most complex of all, it is a social category, referring to a certain way of thinking and acting, it can be an organization, and it can be action, a highly debated and not exactly defined category.

P 1: We have to add here that nonprofit organizations can also have for profit activities – they can publish and sell books, can have income from the market for their services, etc. The Hungarian legal system has newly established categories in this respect – social co-operative, nonprofit ltd., etc.

P 4: In this respect the most important is the prohibition to distribute profits.

P 3: The buoyancy and the energies mentioned, I think were only the characteristics of the elite of the society. Some years ago there was a Hungarian film titled „Moscow square” (A film of Ferenc TÖRÖK, the title refers to one of the main squares of Budapest. It is about the system change in the eyes of a graduating secondary school class) where the grandmother was watching the re-burial ceremony of Imre Nagy, the executed Hungarian prime minister of 1956 on the telly. The majority of this country was watching the system change on the telly and this had a very serious effect on the activity, the participation of the people, community actions later.

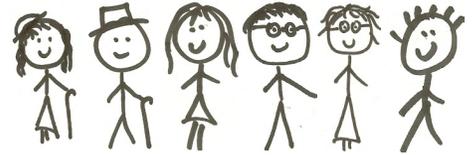
P 1: Global consciousness is a characteristic of a very small part of the society and a very small number of people. Most of the people, most of us live in our mini-world, mini-realities. The difference is enormous between internationally organized groups and local communities in approach, perception. We lived in the 1990s in a way that we did not know anything about the war going on in the country in the neighborhood. We do not see behind the borders of our village.

P 4: There are two basic types of civil behavior. One is the type who knows how many beans make five, takes civil activities as a kind of a business. The other type, I believe the one that makes the majority of us is the type who wants to make the world a tiny bit better day by day. The problem in Hungary is that the butterfly effect does not happen: [some engaged people and organizations] are shaking their wings but they are not enough to make a storm. We do not have a storm yet but at least we have butterflies.

P 4: The answer is simple. There is no one-dimensional person. Life is beautiful because people are interested in many issues at the same time and they like to do different things. At the same time, this sector is good because the vegetarian and the cannibal are also present.

P 4: Civil society is by nature colorful, pluralist. Politicians would prefer it to be transparent and organized. If a local authority wants to talk about an issue, they would prefer a „representative of the civil network”. But civil society organizations do not want that. They want to stay colorful.

Empty term
Society of citizens
Responsibility
Intermediaries



Group 1

P 1: I would say that for majority of people Civil Society would be rather vague and somehow empty term. People often think about it while they interact with state (for example when paying taxes) but it is often (particularly in this case) mentally associated with the certain form of oppression. It is rare that people will associate civil society with common /shared set of values, symbols, attitudes. It is not part of education as far as I can see it from contacts with kids and young people I work with.

P 2: I have the feeling that civil society is as a term mainly used by foreign donors who want to justify and give meaning for their work in this region.

P 3: Problem with the understanding of civil society in this region is very much caused by the fact that there are two very different meanings of it. First, one is more associated with “vertical” relations between individual and the state. Those relations in Poland were historically very fragile and complicated. They are often affected by the lack of trust and packed with mutual suspicions. However, it is not only the state that does not trust its own citizens but also citizens being sometimes “disappointed” by the state. Recently there are cases when people publicly express their will to resign from polish citizenship, in the way “unsubscribe” themselves from the state. However, there is also another dimension of civil society - more “horizontal” / community based more person-to-person type of relations. Maybe we should even look for different words for that (social economy?) This type of relations is based on social capital but unfortunately, they are also quite weak in Poland (of course beyond family ties). Anyway, in Poland both dimensions are weak. It creates obstacles to emergence of civil society of a more “western” type. Looking for alternative framework of description I would suggest – public sphere / space. It is more about “co-responsibility” for both political decisions and shape of community.

P 4: For me there are two different approaches to defining / clustering civil society. One is more about citizens being organized in form of intermediary institutions (sector) the second is more about citizens as individuals. For me or for us as an organization, the second dimension is somehow more important. Thus, we would rather use the term society of citizens - not civil society. We have the feeling that the concept civil society as being predominantly populated by organizations is not sufficient any more. Quite often those forms of organized civil society is not so much representative for citizens but more for self selected groups of individuals who creates them.

P 3: It is true that we lack mechanisms of advocacy (voice) – communication between citizens and the state. Those links are broken.

P 2: I did exaggerate with foreign donors but I was somehow provoked by the (all the same) question again. However, seriously what I believe is that civil society is simply a society of individuals who are subjects (not objects) - people who are responsible, who can build and sustain communities (networks of individuals, groups and institutions). It is extremely important that individuals are not excluded from those networks, and they can be part of it without intermediaries.

P 1: I like very much concept of “society of citizens”. It is important because it goes back to the fundamental question of what is the meaning for me as an individual to be a citizen? It is important to create and define a certain “layer” of identity related to being a citizen (like I’m catholic, I’m Polish etc.). Now - this layer is very thin in Poland.

P 1: Stepping back to this very fundamental issue of defining yourself as citizen. Why we lack it? First, we are leaving school without it. We can easily subscribe ourselves to certain modalities: being disabled, being part of a professional corporation, being from somewhere etc. Those “identities” are somehow not preformatted by the

common identity of being a citizen. The discovery of us being citizens comes when we are involved in dealing with more concrete but narrow actions or concerns. This creates individual paths of becoming citizens, and as a consequence we have different meaning of citizenship. This is unavoidable. But the question remains, whether it creates inclusive civil society or just a puzzle of individual and group interest groups? My belief is that they are often a source of change for the good. It sets examples and creates paths for others to face other challenges. At the same time, I do see the problem that this individual trajectory of civic "awakening" will rather restrict citizenship to only active individuals, often concerned with a specific problem.

Group 2

P 1: Civil Society consists of self-organized citizens (operating between the state and the market). But it is definitely more than institutions of the third sector - it is rather like a "space".

P 2: Civil Society for me has now two important dimensions: the first one is spontaneous communication and the possibility to create individual meaning. Secondly, the dimension of knowledge generation as a civic phenomenon and open exchange of knowledge.

P 3: It is all about responsibility. Civil Society is society populated by people who are acting as responsible actors. It means being responsible for myself, my family and friends, my community. It is about creating meaningful relations and being responsible for their sustainability.

P 4: There are two stories / legends of Civil Society. The first one is more about intermediaries (organizations) as gate keepers. The second one is more positive. The first (Rousseau) is more about civil society as generator of inequalities, about power and self-selected pressure groups. In the second perspective, (Tocqueville) intermediary groups (associations) are the very essence of democracy -> power is distributed/dispersed. The Rousseau version is very different - the role of the state is to ensure equal access to democracy. Those two traditions are still present and compete with each other. Particularly recently in Poland PiS government was directly targeting (rhetorically and factually) the "intermediaries" (for example professional corporations). Some of this criticism was justified but in its generalized form, it was dangerous.

Mod: The recently announced political program of PiS includes type of diagnosis of weakness of Civil Society in Poland. According to it - only groups well connected to foreign support were able to thrive. Indigenous activities were not supported enough.

Non-governmental/non-profit
All of us
Linked to level of state power
Civic activism struggling



Group 1

Group 1 defines civil society by putting the accent on nongovernmental and nonprofit characteristics. They consider the concept of "civil society" is somehow abused right now; we are talking a lot about civil society, but we are not reflecting enough on the content and meaning of civil society. The participants emphasize the fact that civil society is not represented only by NGOs, and this reductionist view on civil society is very common.

Civic activism is only a tool of civil society. For some participants civic activism is specific to militants. The civic activism is taking place when a group of people with well established objectives take action in order to fulfill those objectives.

Group 2

Group 2 defines civil society in a more general way, saying that "civil society is about all of us". Also they stressed out the frequent mistake to reduce civil society to NGOs. Another idea shared by participants was that "civil society = all community taking non-political action", the idea of civil society is connected with the premises of "taking action". This group stressed the importance of internet development for supporting civil society initiatives a lot. About the NGOs sector the comment was that this sector is now like a "monster" created in a top down approach.

So, the Internet offers the conditions for the development of a more genuine and bottom up civil society of NGO initiatives. But they also stressed the fact that the internet can not generate this specific value of civil society. Virtual contact cannot replace the face to face approach between people, the “real” exchange of ideas. But, it is a comfortable and useful surrogate.

Civic activism is very weak in Romania. The idea of civic activism is beyond civil society. For civic activism – you have an idea and the means to put this idea in practice. Civic activism is related to the idea of taking initiative. For the civic activism the motivation is very important. The civic activism can grow if “people pay attention” to general interest issues and ideas. (“They get the message, if they are connected to the right frequency”). For civic activism the important elements / triggers are: personal budget (to be affluent enough), the anthropological data (Romanians don’t have strong associative behavior), the presence of a huge bureaucracy opposed to civic initiatives, the quality of messages sent by NGOs (in general civil society structures).

Both groups:

Across the board there are some common elements defining civil society mentioned by all participants though expressed differently. Examples of civil society structures: NGO’s, interest groups, trade unions, Parents associations, owners associations, journalists, bloggers, commerce chambers, the church (to some extent), coalitions and civic committees.

Some general ideas about the development of the civil society in Romania: The development of civil society is linked to the level of State power. When the State is weak and fragile, the civil society is more active. Many times the NGOs played a “forced role”: they took the place of the political opposition because this opposition was very weak. When the political landscape becomes more mature the relationship with the State changes.

Civic activism – the participants of the focus groups unanimously consider that the civic activism in Romania is very weak. Some participants from the NGO side consider even that the civic activism now is lower than in 2000.

Fulfilment of interest
Overlap
Expressing opinion
Public welfare
Renaissance of citizenship
Energy flows



Group 1

Civil society is a society of active citizens who actively approach fulfillment of their interests in the society.

Civil society is a part of society which complements the public and business sectors even though they overlap to a certain extent. They can overlap on the personal level, i.e. a person working in a state institution can be an activist, and a businessman can actively defend his interests too. However, the mentioned sectors can overlap also in the sphere of their role in the society, in which case we can often describe these relations as competition, for example, there are state schools, private schools as well as schools run by NGOs.

Civil society comprises more than just defining one's position between sectors. For example, in the social sphere, the discussion on what is a private and what is a public interest has been going on for 20 years. The question of what is a business entity and non-profit entity providing services is also widely discussed. Civil society goes beyond these limitations. Civil society basically means a chance to express one's opinion on public matters as well as a suitable environment for doing so. People – individuals grab their chance to express their opinion on public matters thus exercising their human and civil rights.

Civil society gives everyone a chance to address public matters. In Greek democracy only those were called citizens who thought of the wellbeing of others. To name those who only took care of themselves and their families, the ancient Greeks used the expression “idiotos”.

However, it is also important to add that civil activities have their value.

In the contemporary consumption based society, civil society sometimes substitutes processes that used to be common in the past. Many relations within a community were severed as a result of historical development. For example, in the past it was normal to meet and do some craftwork together accompanied by singing and dancing. Unfortunately, today we do things like that only as part of preplanned activities of organizations promoting culture, art, and history. Taking into account the aforementioned, it is necessary to perceive civil society in the context of historical and cultural development of the society of which it is a part.

If we stop looking at civil society as something noble and we try to find its exact position, we will face a big problem. Theory says that civil society consists of people who want to fulfill their need to form associations. But where is that point when a friendly get-together becomes an association? Where lays the difference? Basically, people and their activities can be the same or very similar. People themselves define the limits when they decide to name and institutionalize their gatherings.

So what is important in this context are individuals and the way they perceive themselves in society and the form and institution within which they want to do their activity.

Group 2

Civil society is a group of voluntarily active citizens interested in participating in the administration of public matters.

To answer the question what represents civil society or how strong it is, we have to look at our short history. Active citizens are small islands of positive "deviation" which, at the time of change, have the ability to grow and absorb and activate other active citizens. The power of civil society is linked to the position of these islands in the society. If the environment is favorable, their position is strong. For example, good-quality democratic society is a favorable environment for civil society because it provides conditions for civic activities and for participation in public matters as a result of which few "small islands of positive deviation" turn into a large significant active civil society. On the contrary, if the conditions for active involvement of citizens deteriorate, it signals decreasing of the quality of democracy and justice in society.

In ideal civil society there are so many active citizens dealing with various issues that they eventually cover all of them. The size and quality of civil society in Slovakia is determined by the number of issues active citizens deal with and to a certain extent also by conditions these people have for their initiative.

Civil society is a group of people working for public welfare. The area they work in is not important in this case, crucial here is the fact that they do it for others not only for themselves. What makes these active people part of civil society are the values they represent. The fact that they define their values means that they are not influenced or driven by desire to make profit (business sector) or desire to gain power (political sector). Civil society can thus represent non-partisanship and altruism.

Civil society means people who are dissatisfied with the status quo and who become active in order to change it.

Renaissance of citizenship comes also at times (and maybe it is what we are experiencing right now in Slovakia) when people realize that if they want to change their society they cannot rely on politicians or the almighty market only.

Definition of civil society is very relative. Civil society can be reviewed from various angles. Society is an individual and his/her social part. Therefore, the basic terms used for defining the society are linked with defining the values of an individual in the society such as ethics, for example. Active citizens are those who themselves want to contribute to the wellbeing of the community and they can be driven by various reasons. It depends on their values. Naturally, it is necessary to see clearly how the others perceive these individuals, i.e. how the others identify themselves with the values these active citizens represent.

Both Groups

Summary – civil society is:

- NGOs as institutions of active citizens.
- People who work in these organizations as employees, volunteers, and supporters and who contribute to fulfillment of the goals of civil society.
- Part of public that gladly joins the activists or is active on the individual level. People who follow the situation in the society and the activities of civic organizations and who often bring up new topics and come up with solutions to their own problems or to problems already dealt with by NGOs.
- People who are not active themselves but can be motivated to act.

Finally, we have of group of, as I call them, “anti-activists”. These are often top representatives of other sectors who perceive active citizens as their competitors and treat them accordingly -politicians are convinced that only they are entitled to manage public matters because they underwent the difficult election process, similarly top managers are convinced that their position is untouchable due to all the money they had invested from their own sources.

Let's also look at civil society from the viewpoint of energy flows. Individual as a living creature cannot spend his/her life in the state of permanent vigilance as it is very demanding from the viewpoint of energy consumption. Therefore individuals spend most of their lives in the state of relaxation (in wilderness we see predators sharing the same space with their prey which pays no attention to the predator until the predator's behavior changes). Active citizen reacts similarly. Civil society starts to act when it feels endangered and under pressure. Slovak civil society can be characterized by “the worse, the better” saying. The stronger the pressure from other sectors, the faster the process of citizen activation. However, no one in Slovakia would lie under a tank as the activists in China did. Does this mean that civil society in China is stronger than civil society in Slovakia? Can we judge civil society only based on the greatness of acts done under pressure? As a matter of fact it is important to maintain the ability to stay active especially at times bringing no such pressure upon citizens. If we talk about successes of civil society in Slovakia, we talk about activities of civil groups in years 1989 and 1998. We all know our society lived under enormous pressure at that time. However, we also have to add that the pressure we talk about does not necessarily have to be negative. Even more frequently citizens become active due to positive pressure such as solidarity, pressure triggered by the need to help someone in danger. Identification with an excellent idea or good concept can also help activate people.

The strengths of civil society – what has been achieved?

Effective environmentalists



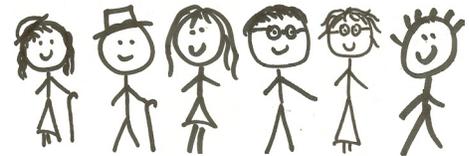
Group 2

Participants unanimously gave an example of effective civil activities – those of environmentalists. Why is that? Because, as respondents claim, environmentalists operate through several regimes – usually it is professional experts who would formulate the problem (in that case biologists, zoologists, etc); volunteers consolidate around them as they realize the significance of the problem and start collaborating in different ways. Then other professionals, lawyers this time, decide how the problem could be solved and begin using all legally admissible means – petitions with particular propositions, searching for contacts with MPs and representatives of the European Parliament; street pressure comes last.

Green movement

1 % law

Small invisible social changes



Group 1

P 4: I think the rights the civil world required became reality. For example the green groups participated in the creation of the Environmental Protection Law. It does not mean that politicians after the political change would have been proactive and care for the civil society but if the citizens wanted to achieve something, they could do it.

Group 2

P 2: The left-right political distinction does not make sense [for the green movement]. Petra Kelly, German green activist said: we are not on the left, not on the right, we are ahead. If you start the game from the other side, it can be done. We have our initiative, the ban on genetically manipulated corn. We could reach a five-party consensus. So in this direction, the case might be easier – as a civil society organization you can easily reach a political consensus than the other way round. If an initiative comes from a political party, the cleavage is already there, consensus is difficult, whatever the cause is.

P 4: The legal background is good. We have a law from 1997 that allows that taxpayers give 1% of their taxes to civil society organizations, the famous 1% law. It has become a Hungaricum, an „export good”; a lot of countries introduced it, or similar versions. We have the „public benefit” category which is also important when we talk about the economic aspects of organizations. We have the National Civil Program that coordinates the state subsidies, this is badly needed since American donors have mostly withdrawn from the region. The share of state financing, basically the money of the taxpayers in this country, has grown and is now around 40%. Normally this development is welcome, however in our country unfortunately, those who distribute these subsidies (taxpayers’ money) e.g. local authorities, government, etc. think that by giving subsidies they buy unlimited control over the organizations. Now, that is tragic. When we talk about Structural Funds money, we run into a system where civil society organization are much more thoroughly controlled (monitored, to put it elegantly) than a private business or a state agency. That is appalling.

Mod: OK, OK, but as a citizen I do not really care about the technical details of legal circumstances. Where are the big and visible successes?

P 3: There are big successes. I think the biggest ones are invisible. Those are in the local communities where there is social help, where there are employment initiatives and two more people found a job in the village as a result. And this is especially important because the success was reached contrary to bad financial and bureaucratic circumstances. On the other hand, the other most important mission of civil society organizations is the zengo-type of activities, now that is problematic, or better put - unsatisfactory. There is unfortunately very little watchdog type of activities, e.g. when a civil society organization starts legal action against the state because they deny making a state subsidy contract public.

P 1: Success is mostly small things, not very media-likable. In Budapest, the number of homeless people has not decreased, but thanks to civil society organizations, few of them froze. The situation could have been a lot worse, but this is hard to recognize.

P 2: Yes, we always want big, spectacular things. Smaller cases are not in the news but they are important.

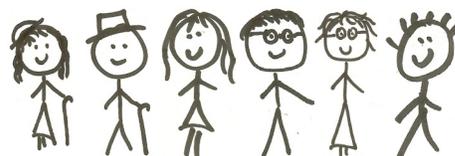
Mod: You did mention that there is a definite quantitative development in terms of number of organizations. At the same time your marks are weak, showing that there are serious problems with the quality of organizations. Can you tell me why? And what is the direction of the developments?

P 2: I am a green activist; in our movement we do have strong co-operation among us, we are organized, we have our yearly meeting with the participation of all the member organizations. We have our representatives on every forum we could join and we give feedback to the others. So we have cooperation and effective interest representation.

P 4: Now that is an issue there – I wonder why the greens are so exceptional in this country. Because we cannot mention another area where civil society is active that is so organized and effective like the greens. Everywhere else we compete instead of cooperation, everybody wants to be the boss and tell the others what to do.

P 2: Maybe we feel the dangers. We know that the life on Earth is unsustainable. And I have to add here that it was not always so. In the old times, in the times when there were few organizations and a lot of activists, there was a lot of enthusiasm. Then this enthusiasm weakened when more organizations were established, when things became formalized. In the 2000s co-operation again improved a lot.

Intellectual understanding
Stable growth
Journey
Civic spaces
Time matter



Group 1

P 5: In my opinion over the last 20 years, I would say there is progress mainly on the meta-level. Intellectually we have more understanding of civil society: books, articles, research. Unfortunately, it is not so obvious in terms of mentality and everyday behaviors, where we are not performing so well. Massive “one-day” activities might even “shadow” or obscure the lack of more day to day activities. However, in every form of judgment, there is always the question of “reference line”, in my opinion in the region we are performing pretty well, although it may be a long way to go if we compare with more developed democracies. There are elements which can be treated as a success, and the most direct example is the huge amount of energy which was generated by disabled people and their families: thousands of places are run by self-organized citizens.

P 1: The first period [of civil society] was very chaotic, building “something out of nothing” and there was heroism but also a lot of fraud, self-dealing etc. I think this has changed, people are more aware of what is right and wrong in public life. Nowadays people are much better equipped in terms of skills to protect their rights, e.g. they know how to use media in a reasonable way. It is getting normal and we can harvest the slow but stable growth of democratic institutions.

P 6: I have two perspectives, one is that civil society is not a “state of the matters” it is rather a process or journey. The second is that in Poland people are “becoming citizens” on a kind of occasional basis, it is not given that it is an everyday experience, but it is often a moment of “being a citizen”. My observation is also that sometimes it is easier to provoke us to do something small like sending an SMS for causes which are somehow distance from us e.g. hunger in Africa, than to do something concrete like reacting in cases of aggression against the children next door.

P 4: I have a more general observation. We can complain about some aspects of third sector activities but within the sector there are at least some structures able to counterbalance the state in some instances. There is much worse if we think about individual citizens possibility for influence, there I don’t see so much difference.

P 2: I believe that “times matter”. It is true that we are weak still but I see more and more examples and attempts to incrementally build better communication.

Group 2

P 1: There are some “natural” spots for activism, for example parents’ councils in schools. Potentially these should be strong entities but in practice they are often too weak , and to be honest the source of the problems is not only hostile official school structures, but also apathy of the parents.

P 3: There are many places like this. Voluntary Fire Brigades, Schools, Parishes - they are all potentially “civic spaces”.

P 6: It is true, recently I participated in research related to civic dimension of parishes and it occurred that in fact these are places of activism although very often we do not see it on our radars. Obviously, there are other questions about the civic nature of those activities such as level of control and leadership by clergy, but parishes are still more like spaces or generic platform of activities, even possibly more open. For many people the parish is still an object easier to understand than the vague third sector organizations, it is much more incorporated into our collective mental map. For the more general issue of informal spontaneous activism, some people/researches suggest that real activism is located there and there is no need to lament about civil society.

P 4: It is a good point, in a sense Putnam himself has recently questioned his own Bowling Alone hypothesis. Civic activity is not vanishing it is rather transforming into different forms: like massive protests, internet activism etc.

EU accession
Legal cases
2 %
Non-formal associability



There are several examples of achievements and important events created by civil society: the focus group participants mentioned: Communism Trial (Procesul comunismului), enactment of FOIA legislation, Piata Universitatii events (at the beginning of 90s), abolition of the article 200 on gay and lesbians from the Penal Code, the “lessons” of the Alianta Civica and Alternativa pentru Romania (both civic movements registered latter as political parties), GO 26/2000, the law 2%, EU accession.

Concerning Romanians associative behavior, some participants (mainly NGO representatives) expressed their concern that communal behavior is strongly influenced by the available funding. One participant mentioned that we assist the growing trend of non-formal associability, especially related to internet. Through internet people started to communicate and to generate common projects we assist the development of virtual communities and more and more people donate money for NGOs through internet. They have another option to express their charity or interest outside the “classical” donations to the Church.

Another participant expressed the view that the associative spirit is growing, even if the NGO sector is somehow in crisis. We assist to the development of alternative ways to express the associative spirit. It was also mentioned that in a corrupt society the associative spirit is good, because in this way the society generate pressure for more debate. The citizens "don't buy" already made solutions so easy. There are also cultural and regional differences in Romania and the experience acquired by Romanians working in western countries is very important. They come home already educated about the importance of building associations in order to act together for a common interest or cause.

The participants from the second group (mainly media) provided additional comments related to associative behavior. One participant mentioned the fact that the Romanians are nation are inclined to associative behavior, but not in a structured way. For a structured approach we have to face some obstacles as: cultural obstacles, lack of civic education, lack of civic space, bad television, 45% of the population in rural areas. Another participant stressed the importance of the recent change of the electoral system – to uninominal vote. He considers that the civil society structures (NGOs mainly) should play a role in educating the citizens on how to interact with their political representative.

*Different perspectives
Transition of '89
Proposals for change
Diversity*



Group 1

Before we start it is necessary to say that people directly involved in the activities of CS and people from the outside environment perceive the successes of CS differently. For people directly involved in the activities of CS the greatest success is the fulfillment of their goals - satisfied clients of social service institutions, a disabled person who has found a job thanks to our intervention, an agreement, e.g. between social partners, concluded based on a managed dialogue, a book, an amended section of an act, citizens abiding by good regulations.

Looking at the past 20 years of Slovak CS from the outside, the most visible success was the opposition to the emerging authoritarian political representation of Vladimír Mečiar. Similarly, the political changes that took place in Czechoslovakia in 1989 can be considered a great success by both the Slovaks and Czechs. However, to be honest, we have to add that the movement in Slovakia never reached the strength and dimension of the movement in Bohemia.

We can say that active citizens in Slovakia know, if necessary, the right way to persuade others, perhaps less active citizens, to adopt their viewpoint. It seems that in decisive moments activists were able to motivate successfully large numbers of people. Figures are not that important, though. The intensity of activities is important, the intensity of manifestation, and changes that took place in 1989 and 1998 in Slovakia.

Another positive thing was that NGOs have produced many proposals for changing the system. These proposals ranged from really big ones such as the health care system and public administration reforms to perhaps less known and less conceptual but equally important changes of the legislation. This could have occurred as a result of the abnormal situation in the society at the time, when NGOs provided space for professionals, intellectuals, and innovators who were pushed out from public administration due to their political views. This does not happen in stable democracies. Besides providing a kind of a background for experts, NGOs today represent also a space for their discussions and confrontations with laics. Another positive feature is the ability of CS to generate feedback to administrators of public matters.

Diversity of CS has its positive effects too. Diversity means that CS is able to react to and bring up a variety of topics and initiatives.

Group 2

Civil sector in Slovakia achieved its greatest successes at the times of great pressure on citizens. Before 1989 activists knew their deeds would put them in danger (even though it was not necessary to lay under a tank, the activists were ready to do so). On the other hand the role of activists (e.g. environment protection activists) in the political turmoil of November 1989 is undisputable and generally acknowledged, just like the role of civil activists in the changes that took place in 1989. The events of 1989 and 1998 brought about significant changes in our society and it is an important fact that Slovak civil society was an active part of these changes.

Activism in small communities can be viewed from a similar perspective. Again, it is mainly the pressure of the environment that stirs action (I consider the intention to replace a park by a new multi-functional building right in front of my window a direct pressure upon myself). It is very positive that in the past two years we have recorded visible demonstrations of civil activism also on the lowest level. For example, in the past 5 years, Ružinov district in Bratislava has witnessed the foundation of more than 16 new civil initiatives which have started to communicate and support each other and which have the potential to achieve the right systematic solutions in their district in the future.

Highly positive is also the fact that civil activists have accomplished a great deal in certain cases. It does not necessarily mean that their initiatives were successes. From the viewpoint of civil activists "a great deal" means that they succeeded in persuading a substantial number of other inhabitants to support them, they took the steps that our legislation enable them to take, they defended the value and public interest with dignity and regardless of the positive or negative outcome they were able to describe the process and offer its positive aspects to activists dealing with other issues.

Further positive aspects concern the civil sector itself, e.g. introduction of the 2 % assignation mechanism which have had a positive financial impact on NGOs (but which is paradoxically often criticized by NGOs themselves). At the same time, this mechanism enables individuals and corporations to play an active role in deciding how to spend at least a small amount of their tax and present their positive proposals for development of the society.

In recent years, another highly positive aspect is the emergence of eCommunities and their inclusion into the "information mainstream" by printed media. Printed dailies give bloggers space for presenting minority, authentically civil opinions.

Diversity of opinions is a great strength of Slovak civil sector. Naturally, this aspect can be both positive and negative since diversity means also great disunity. How far should we go in attempts to unite ourselves? This question has been publicly discussed for a long time. In Slovak context the answer to the question comes again from the pressure of other sectors of society to which, fortunately, CS has always responded so far (e.g. CS succeeded in stopping the Association Act which would institutionally throw civic society back to the period before 1989). Facing the threat, representatives of CS managed to overcome their differences and presented their arguments together.

The weaknesses – which important problems have not been addressed or resolved by civil society?

Privatization
European fund dependency
New activism
Poor consultative mechanisms



Group 1

Most of the participants, engaged in analyzing societal processes as a whole, used the perspectives civil society within the thorough social context. Their pessimism was based on the following impressions: “currently total privatization of the social interest can be observed. Social interest refers to the opportunity given to people to participate in decision making processes and privatization, on the other hand, it is a fact that a group of people has appropriated the right to make significant social decisions taking into consideration only their own interest. Some participants even believe that those people [in power] are businessmen rather than politicians.”

Alongside this process, the privatization of civil structures is also developing through European structural funds financing. The financing issue is of key significance since currently these social structures are thoroughly dependent on EU funds. As EU funds pass through the state authority, both state and local authorities establish “their own” NGOs serving their own interests, and those new NGOs are financed at the expense of old and authentic NGOs which have lost their influence.

Most participants have some experience with the authority and have confronted it a number of times, and they have lost the illusion that civil society could count as a factor. Even participants starting their statements “the good news is that...” would eventually come to the conclusion that at present it is even harder to work than before.

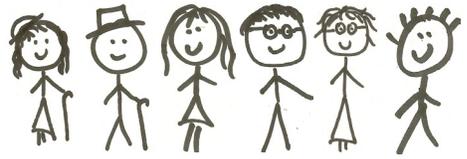
Group 2

It is exactly because “new activism” includes groups of people with different problems, that it is rather particular and communicative, that means it would barely lead to large-scale activities or protests. Indeed it is of key significance to institutionalize some internet channels for propositions for and control of government decisions – the Web is not only the new public space where different groups are constituted, but it is also perceived as a main mechanism for civic participation.

“I fight for, not against”, “I fight against heroism, but for normal participation”; the other important issue is the formation of civil culture and education, the debate should be educational and people should be aware of their rights.

As far as prioritizing of socially significant problems is concerned, it was hard to define such common problems. However, there was definitely some bitterness due to the lack of civil participation mechanisms in the decision making processes or control over those decisions: “nobody requires our opinion”. It is exactly due to the voluntary choice of standing up for oneself, either through a common problem or activity, which shifts the focus from projects or financing and makes it spontaneous and voluntary activity. However this may lead to problem with formulating a joint thesis – the Web is many-voiced, it is about communicating and sharing, it is not just some space for rational formulation of theses and strategies. As a main problem, all the focus group participants perceive the “problem clarification”, the formulation of clear-cut theses and demands to create a critical mass behind an action.

Administrative burdens
Dependence on state funding
Lack of civil courage
Idiot



Group 1:

P 2: If someone establishes an association, they have to work with decrees, specimen of signatures, banks, Tax Office for 6 months. I would not like to establish an organization... So, where have we arrived at after 20 years? At a bureaucratic space where we cannot put our ideas and intentions into practice, if we have them at all...

P 3: I think the politicians played important role because they created the regulations for self-organization. It is problematic for NGOs to participate in the decision – making processes

P 5: Very often beneficiaries [of state funding] and supported organizations are dependent on their supporters.

Mod: They are expected to be loyal. It is a weakness of our democracy.

P 5: If we approach the question in the way that I provide a service, theoretically it mustn't happen. But in reality it is difficult to expect it because there is a „double speaking” always. It is a real danger that we will be moved from the cultural house where we work and cannot provide our services if we continue our advocacy function. But on other hand, these functions are mixed in our organization and I cannot expect from the local government not to mix it and let us provide services and also initiate local referendums for example

P 4: This shows how young our civil sector is. In other parts of the world where the civil sector is much stronger, the solution is easy: the organization splits. But in Hungary, the old friendships, human relations keep it together. An organization which provides services to the community has to feel that its income, livelihood, functionality do not depend on the community but the local government, then what are we talking about? Somehow civil organizations take their hands in different stories but it is not a strategic approach at all.

Mod: I think the dark side of it is that a political body creates a blackmailing situation without any consequence.

P 2: It would be a blackmailing situation if it were expressed. In this way, it is only an uncomfortable situation. The direct communication would be to say that OK if you finish the Tubes issue, we sign a contract with you. But this kind of direct communication in the reality does not happen.

P 3: I think in healthy societies it cannot happen. The local government or the state should say that you provide services; I give you the necessary sources for it. Anyway, I do not like that you raised your voice but there is not any relation between them. It is obvious that the situation is different in Hungary.

Group 2

P 3: I believe political debates are natural and may be beneficial for the entire society. We do have to accept other opinions and have to learn to accept others' opinions. On the other hand, I accept that the current atmosphere and state of party politics in Hungary can be rather bad for civil society organizations, the media concentrate on cases where party politicians use civil society organizations for illegal party financing tricks. This might be rather bad for the entire civil sector since small successes are never mentioned, only scandals.

P 1: I do miss civil courage. Neither organizations, nor individuals want to reflect on each other.

P 2: IDIOT – in ancient Greece this is how people were called who did not want to participate in politics or the common issues within the community. Civil society organizations per definition participate in politics since they deal with community issues, however today party politics is not about this. We have to get back politics, so that it is again about community issues.

P 3: I have some data. They are from a book edited by Mária Kopp, about the state of Hungarian individuals and society. About 10 % of Hungarian society is a member of any organization, this is very low and shows a passive society with low participation. The other figure which I was actually surprised by is that there is a correlation between participation (membership in organizations) and life expectancy. If we live an active life, participate in our communities (local, professional, or any kind) we live longer. People probably don't know this enough, but life is more enjoyable if our relationships are wide and we care for our communities.

P 1: Volunteerism during the system change was preposterous and exceptional. Today it is an accepted, everyday activity, although figures show that it is still very low in our country. Today we have a problem that the number of places where volunteers are welcome isn't enough. On the other hand, volunteerism in local communities is still very weak, in most places. We do not co-operate enough, either on the individual level, or on organizational level.

Normative dimension
Civic energy
Organizational capacity
Professionalization
Time deficit



Group 1

P 2: Having in mind first the institutional/sectoral perspective we are performing quite well, NGOs are operating rather well in an administrative way. The biggest problem I guess is with normative dimension. We are far from being the “good” civil society - inclusive, open, accepting others, committed to common good etc. We have certain capacity to be collectively “good” civil society, but it is often for short periods. It is not just us, we can take the example of Ukrainians e.g. in 2004, they were also very much “good” civil society at this particular moment.

P 1: Speaking of Ukraine I would say there is also a problem of mutual learning within this region, we are not cooperating enough. Poland often perceives itself as a kind of “stronghold” in the region, but in reality, this is far from obvious.

P 5: There are arenas, particularly formal politics, which are not driven by civic energy and this deficit hits us back. This last period [of civil society development] is just obsession about how to access and consume EU funds, and at the same time kind of reflection about what is going to happen “after”, how to build real stability and sustainability after EU funds.

P 4: Bureaucratic culture is not changing so much, there are plenty of “words” but not so much action.

P 3: [Defining citizenship identity based on individual action and problems] has also some bad consequences. Various interest groups very often do not communicate with each other, sometimes they are even hostile and competitive. This phenomenon is somehow related to bigger debate about post modernity, there are more and more group identities built on ad hoc incidental shared experience: like being a mother with small children, having a child which is supposed to participate in preschool education or even being a fan of a specific type of music, etc. The problematic thing is lack of communication among those “identities” and lack of overall bigger framework of shared identity. There is also problem with lack of communication with the administration, example of this is the fake mechanisms of so-called public consultations.

P 3 + 2: There is an issue of lack of continuum between private and public people do not define their problem and abuses (like aggression within family) as public issues. The concept that I have the right to live without aggression at home is rare. Comparing with other places in the region I would say that the level of public awareness is much higher, however far from being satisfactory.

P 3 + 1: What is missing for me is community (gmina) in a deeper sense of the word, missing in Poland is territory based networks of properly connected, institutions, a complete landscape of church, school, shops, coffee shops, park etc. Such a territory is the most natural “micro cosmos” of civil society. A separate issue is that we often ignore business as an important ingredient of civil society, this is a big mistake. They have the capacity to change things and do something concrete. They produce things, pay taxes, give employment, transform local landscape etc and still we treat them with a kind of moral supremacy and this is a mistake. In Poland, business people were never perceived as the elite (of course they might think of themselves differently), the term elite was reserved for intelligentsia, it is an anachronism.

Group 2

P 5: I believe civil society in Poland is representing itself by individual and often small episodes or actions. Unfortunately, there is not enough of them to verify the existence of “good” Civil Society, just moments created by abnegates and rather exceptions than norms. Much more common is the lack of “community spirit” and lack of respect for common or collective good. This is the bottom line and very visible indicator of the overall condition of Civil Society.

P 1: What I see as problematic for many organizations is a problem of organizational capacity. It is much too often driven by a single individual not being able to - or not willing to - build an “institution” but instead is constructing his / her “extended ego”. Often there is problems of succession of leadership, and organizations are not able to live on “beyond” its founders. Another problem is that sometimes even well organized initiatives are not so “civil”. Soft version of this might be church organizations, often they do a good job but they are not so democratic and self-driven. Of course there are some extreme and even dangerous examples of authoritarian anti-democratic organizations and movements, and this is the “dark side” of civil society. But there are also positive examples of spontaneous activities organized by individuals.

P 3: There is a problem of too professionalized civic organizations. Unfortunately, it is not always paired with quality, but often just about heaving a job. The third sector is populated by people who are well trained in different fund raising techniques, they are able to write proposals and they know how to survive. On the other hand there are not enough people who are altruistic in a deeper sense, who will act just because they like it and not because it is expected and awarded by donors.

P 4: Another hypothesis is related to Hirschman’s “shifting involvements” of the public and private arena, I think it might be simpler in Poland. The ethos of the intelligentsia has evaporated, and there is still not enough time to build a new ethos of public involvement. There are some forms of public activism, but they are in a sense marginal and appealing to passionate individuals. There is still no “middle class” civil society, the middle class constitutes itself slowly and in the first instance is more preoccupied with its material status and attributes. This group is still not getting itself organized to demand and defend its rights. Another characteristic is the lack of civic life in the new wealthy suburbia, people who live there are busy contemplating their eventual move to “something of their own”. Maybe the next generation which will grow up in those places will take it for granted and be able to act differently. Warsaw has a huge number of gated wealthy condominiums – the largest in Europe, and there are good reasons to believe that those places are not “islands” of collective life. They have separate themselves in a golden cage protected from the outside world, but they are also separated as individual families. Who knows, maybe it is all due to being “too close” in the previous era, living in communal densely populated houses with no privacy, maybe there is a need for people’s own territory?

P 6: All data shows that recently people don’t need formal organization to get together. There are many tools for on-line communication and on-line organizing, for example MySociety and its set of tools, particularly services like Groups Near You.

P 2 + 7: There are limits however, to this “shift” into internet, not everything can be transferred there. There are also some specific features of Polish “translation” of internet based ideas, for example the Polish version of Pledge Bank is not so much about collective efforts for public good, it is more about protesting or just doing stupid things. In fact, being on the internet is often another form of escape which is quite

contrary to participation.

Mod + P 4: It is true that all indicators of everyday civic activities are going down but there are also some “moments” of collective activity which represent a certain “need of belonging”. This need is often pushed aside in everyday life and reveals itself only in special moments and we have a problem with expressing these kinds of needs, it is not only a Polish problem but it exists also in other CEE countries. Maybe we are not “self confident” enough not courageous enough, we still believe that we constantly have to justify who we are? We need very strong moments to go beyond the threshold of showing our emotions publicly, and to do so we need to see others being able to do the same and show their soft sides. Even in these moments however, people very often are not together but rather next to each other.

P 1: We are not educationally equipped with basic social skills of doing things together and communicating with each other. Therefore we are not competent in civic virtues, we need specific settings to start conversation in a real (not virtual) sense.

P 4: In the reality of social life, there is a need for conversational situations and need for reciprocity. Nowadays we are somehow lacking this. An example is talking about kids and helping each other with starting a car, it is disappearing.

P 2 + 5: Being a sport fan can also potentially play this role, but in the Polish situation it is often ambiguous. Looking for collective activities one should also not forget groups like Radio Maryj, like it or not - but it is definitely a massive phenomenon. Another one is Wikipedia (Poland has 4th biggest number of contributors in the world).

P 8: Maybe we are just in this initial phase of accumulation of capital. What is important is much about what we have and not who we are, this phase might be unavoidable.

P 7: But it is also true that in Poland one has to work much harder to get necessary (or even not necessary) goods. People here work more and thus it might also be simply a problem of time deficit [to engage].

*Trust level in NGOs
Leadership problems
post EU strategy
Media driven*



Group 1

The participants consider that one of the big problems for civil society is the fact that NGOs are alienated from the citizens “the civil society don’t feel that NGOs are a part of it”. Problematic aspects are: low citizens trust level in NGOs (under 30%); low number of volunteers; not so many good examples of successful collective action.

They also mentioned that in the political discourse we make appeal to “Romanians”, not “citizens”. The citizen is not motivated to participate in politics. They don’t go to vote anymore, they feel that general problems like corruption are impossible to solve. There are high rates of absenteeism, negative vote and low participation in decision-making.

Participants listed the following important problems for civil society: Weak partnership with public authorities as the value of partnership is not internalized or completely understood; the relationship with the business sector, there are a lot of expectations for financial support from the business sector but in reality the relationship is still fragile. Another problem is the low level of federalization and coalitions created among NGOs, we have very few examples of good successful coalitions. A general accepted idea is that the Internet is a very good support for collective actions, or at least for mobilization, however it is not enough, there needs to be more commitment to acting together. Participants considered the risk of replacing real communication with the internet, and highlighted that face-to-face communication is very important: “we lack the human element.” One participant made a comment about the Romanian NGO Forum claiming that the event has become a managers’ forum: “we become not NGOs, but

small companies. Where is the enthusiasm?"

"A leader should be close with the needs"...; "They are many organizations representing a good example, but it is hard to find something exceptional. In general participants agreed that it was difficult for them to indicate special examples of leadership and innovation in the civil society area. Participants also expressed concerns related to lack of post EU accession strategy.

Group 2

Problematic aspects mentioned: the lack of confidence in the law, from school where the children are being taught that the law is done only for stupid people. Human resources quality is not so good anymore, the young generation is not interested to work for NGOs anymore. A problematic aspect in Romania is that there is not any serious publication about civil society development, history, etc. Some participants mentioned that "sometimes there is a bizarre connection between state and civil society", a sort of "clientelism". Another participant mentioned the problematic aspect of accessing structural funds.

Not being able to count on successful collective action was also mentioned: "in order to create successful collective action we need good subjects and means to put them into practice. We have to respond to citizens' expectations". Many participants expressed concern regarding citizens' disappointment with politics and with the bad performance of the administration: "the public administration is made to prevent you from doing anything".

Participants discussed a lot about the influence of media in generating "leaders", they underlined that in Romania there are "media driven" leaders these days. The conclusion is however, that today in Romania we don't have strong civic personalities but more media generated public persona

Loss of credit and ethos
Unstable environment
Regional differences
Moral authority



Group 1

What is on one hand considered good or successful can on the other hand be labeled a failure. People involved in civil society have lost their credit and ethos characteristic of civil society, in the eyes of their partners in other sectors. This is due to their uncompromising interference with big politics. Politicians say these actions of civil organizations have political not altruistic or civic background. Entrepreneurs similarly described civil sector as a sector yearning for power. Moreover, the public they address and mobilize shifted their frustration resulting from unfulfilled promises regarding political changes, on to NGOs.

Yet another problem is that despite their effort, NGOs were not able to achieve systematic changes in society that are crucial for the creation of a stable environment for their functioning. Financial mechanisms such as support from the government and local self-governments which should serve as a basic source of support for civil society without the need to intervene from abroad are very limited. Support from corporations based on unstable assignment mechanism is not sufficiently developed either. Individual philanthropy is absent completely. What is even worse, not only philanthropy but also volunteering stopped developing, if it exists then it is only to mitigate the consequences of problems.

Slovak NGOs miss professionalism, there are only a few people who devote themselves to development of NGOs. For example in social organizations all employees focus on provision of the service itself, nobody pays attention to the development of the institution. Undeveloped institutions have far less opportunity to communicate with local or foreign NGOs, this may from the outside seem as lack of mutual solidarity. As a result NGOs become easily and frequently victims of proposals deteriorating the conditions for their functioning (e.g. new draft Social Service Act).

Unfortunately, neither civil activists nor civil society participate in solving the problem of huge regional differences [that exist in Slovakia]. While in towns and especially in Bratislava we observe some demonstrations of activism, in rural areas and economically less developed environment the situation is worse.

Group 2

Obviously, from the inside one identifies more strengths and weaknesses than from the outside where only significant ones bringing overall change, are visible.

Slovak society misses moral authorities, which is a big problem. There is a lack of people from the areas of culture, science, and politics who would be willing to take over the responsibility and express their opinions on problems of society with the ambition to be accepted by public. The Church in Slovakia lacks moral authority too. As a result it is not perceived as a moral entity by society. Representatives of the Church in Slovakia do not deal with the problem of values, they do not set an example for the society and they do not attempt to impart their moral ethos to the society.

This is not exclusively a problem of the civil sector, representatives of political parties and businessmen face it too. The most acknowledged businessmen in Slovakia are the spoiled sons of former Communist party leaders. Similarly, leaders of political parties are mainly politicians who are always ready to compromise inside their parties.

What are the most important public issues/problems to address by citizens and civil society?

Government control
High culture
eDemocracy
Open Source



Group 1

Participants believe that there are enough institutional channels for participation in and controlling of the government, the point is that it has to become effective and decisive from the “privatization implementers”. Therefore they identify the following priorities:

- To assist the development and establishment of alternative civil activity subjects, investing in developing local communities, stimulating the development and maintenance of networks that could manage, channel and concentrate civil resources
- To stimulate campaigns that would work for removing the administrating of structural funds from state institutions in order to minimize the political and corruption pressure;
- To look for self-funding mechanisms of civil initiatives;
- To stimulate and finance watch dogs activities;
- To finance government policies monitoring and organize a permanent judicial system control structure.

Group 2

In order to turn “my” problem into a significant one for more people, besides looking for adherents, professional experts need to be found as they would formulate both the problem and the respective requirements precisely and clearly; then active action should follow. In other words, Web activism needs expert knowledge, it sort of realizes it cannot be spontaneous – experts should play key roles in formulating both a problem and the strategies for its solution. The idea of expertise goes alongside the idea of improving education as a whole, and boosting civil expertise in particular.

Web activism does not exclude institutions, on the contrary, its representatives strive for institutionalizing their participation in the government process – i.e. provide mechanisms that would guarantee that the position of a particular group will be taken into consideration when making a particular decision. Here the institutionalizing of the eDemocracy mechanisms and the different forms of deliberative democracy is of key importance. When it is evident that “no one is listening”, street demonstrations and pressure may follow.

When asked “If you had the money, which problem would you solve?” the answers were: “the Prime Minister should...” or “this and that minister is supposed to...” Often revolving around education and the financing of “high culture.”

Everyone appeared to be a free culture fan; however there was no evidence of considering things through one's own project interest.

- There is absolute necessity for the institutionalization of civic mechanisms for participation and control of the decision making processes – “I want to have the opportunity to fight for something”.
- The new public space for defending one's interests and for alternative policies is definitely the internet, therefore the internet space should be perceived as a valid public forum, provided that people identify themselves as they state their claims
- The time is ripe for introducing certain eDemocracy mechanisms: developing mechanisms for gathering civil and expert opinions through the internet, organizing subscription lists through the net and developing legislative initiatives that would oblige state and political institutions to take such initiatives into consideration
- “Open Source” and Linux should be introduced in the state administration as “civil servants should be trained” to use freely the new informational technologies
- Encouraging work with and through international civil networks as they are not merely a conductor of civil cul-

ture and know-how, but also provide civil initiatives with different legitimacy.

- Work for improving the social image of the civil sector, including monitoring of procedures, project financing and results. .

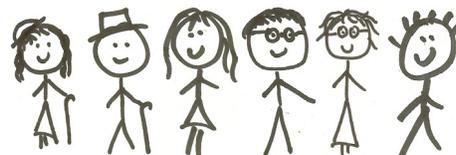
Both Groups

Despite the differences, both focus groups are identifying the problem of democratic shortage, of excluding citizens from decision making processes or exerting control over them. Defined slightly differently by the different types of participants: the independent activist group state “nobody listens to us, nobody cares about us” and “there are no established channels for public participation.” The representatives from established organizations on the other hand, claim that all social resources for authority access have been privatized.

Common recommendations of both FGs for activity priority financing:

- Development and financing of alternative policies: it is crucially necessary that experts debate and develop some alternatives to the policies currently applied in socially significant areas, as well as that civil priority strategies were formulated. Although both groups come up with a similar message, the method of achieving this is a bit different, the expert knowledge organization perceives it differently: independent activists putting their faith in think-tanks, while the established group focused rather on creation of working expert groups to formulate problems and propose strategies for solving them with some socially active groups consolidated around them – a form of expert-civil activity.
- Emphasis on the bringing-up and cultivation of civic culture, encouraging initiatives that develop skills for public defense of social interests, paying attention to social education, develop and propose new procedures, know-how and normative base.

Volunteerism
Restarting change process
Social basis
Community development



Group 1

P 4: The sector should show much more voluntarism. There are too many paid activists here.

P 2: But P 4, the society itself should show more voluntarism not the sector. There is not a sector, there is only society. It is obvious that the legal environment should be changed. It does not make sense to have rules and regulations of the coordination if there are no consequences if somebody violates them. We could experience in the last years how public consultations disappeared from the Hungarian legal system because of the interests of different investors, if an important investor wants to build something, the interests of the local people are put into parentheses.

P 5: If we go back to the times of political changes, we can state that one of the achievements was that there are a lot of rules and regulations on public participation. The problem is that its juridical practice has not been formed, we can see a lot of issues when the law is violated. But it is also true that these rules are not utilized as the people do not take the opportunity to use them. There is no any real intention to cooperate with each other.

P 3: I agree that we should change the legal environment. Partly it would make sense to revise the rules but on other hand it is a joke that the State itself does not keep the rules. We also know that Hungarian courts are not friendly with NGOs. Also, it would be needed to change the financing system, with regards to the National Civil Fund serious conflict of interest can be brought up. The biggest challenge is to change attitudes and change the culture. If I were ironic I would say we should start the whole change again.

Group 2

Mod: I would like to ask you to tell me what should be important, what we should concentrate in the

future, what would be your dreams? Money doesn't matter: in your dreams it would all be available...

P 1: We need social basis. There are a lot of civil society organizations that are run by one or two people and fight for survival, not the survival of the organization but the survival of the issue. People should acknowledge that they have to fight for their own community, for the sustainability of their own community. We need real participatory democracy. The other issue is that we should restrain bureaucracy, we are suffocating in administration, statistics and reports. We are not surprised anymore that the state does not fulfill its contracted obligations but we need watchdog organizations that dare to challenge these issues. The third issue is that the civil and business sector should be linked, the two worlds have to be bridged, today they do not understand each other and there is mistrust between them. Communities would be better served if the two could talk to each other.

P 3: I would like to make people behave like adults. I have two examples: the first is about the reaction of people when they get into a straightforwardly unfair situation, for example they get a phone bill that cannot be valid. They can have three strategies: not to fight and pay, try the legal option through some state agency for consumer protection, usually useless or try to find others who have had the same experience. I prefer the third and I wish there were plenty of these organizations to help each other and fight for our rights. The other example is about the current crisis situation. We talk a lot about the necessity to cut back state subsidies, especially about the allowance the state gives to families with children, which goes to families irrespective of their financial situation. The new option, currently loudly debated is to give the money only to families in need, but then you need bureaucracy to collect papers and make the appropriate decisions. I have not heard an option that would say: trust people! Make them decide whether they need that money from the community or not. Ask them to refuse it if they think they are not in need.

P 2: I would like to reach those people who do not accept that those in power do whatever they want. It would be good if people knew what we achieve, that they had information of the success stories, and not only the big cases but others as well. I would like to reach that sense of caring for the community - participation in general is fashionable.

P 4: I think all of us think in the same direction. I think the key for all of the issues raised is community development. Although there are plenty of organizations dealing with this issue, we should have more. Building local communities is the key to build civil society. In a society the least "conscious" strata is the poor, among those below low-middle class, there is no civil courage, if there is money available, I would spend on them.

Who is responsible?
Activity of parishes
Passive schools
Narcissistic youth values
Role of media



Group 1

P 4: There is a big question of who should be responsible for a "better" civil society and what the role of the state is. An example, yesterday I was visiting the oldest Senior Club in Warsaw which used to be supported by the City Hall. Suddenly they were informed that the support will be cut by half, no explanation just this information. Who knows, maybe there are some good reasons for this but it is arrogant to leave people without explanation, these are active people who should not be ignored and treated instrumentally. I'm not sure whether the administration might support civil society but at least it should not make active people frustrated. In consequence, those who are "heard" by administration are mainly, "vocal" individuals who are, mainly for the sake of their own interest, pushing the administration, sometimes you can even hear people from the administration praising them as examples of active citizenship. Is there a way to go beyond this?

P 5: I cannot answer question about "division of labor" for civil society but I can point those elements or institutions, which are crucial for development of civil society. In my opinion, an important issue in Poland is the activity of parishes, they are potentially crucial for nurturing cooperative and community practice,

but this is currently a very much unrealized potential. The second element would be the educational system, civic education is almost none-existing in primary and secondary schools and in my opinion, it should be introduced even in preschools, not mentioning at the university or in programs of life-long learning.

P 1: I want to support this view, I work with kids and I can see that schools are very passive in terms of work with civic education, they will not step beyond what is formally required. A separate issue is the university whose educational pattern is so old fashioned. During the studies, there is no message about myself in society, particularly with regards to my obligations. There is almost no training in terms of “doing” things, it is just studying. We study as individuals “in parallel”, we have no chances to interact with real institutions.

P 3: I also think educational systems are crucial. With the overall pattern of more and more individualism, institutions have to create the “immune system”. In practice, they work exactly the opposite, the whole system is extremely individualistic and based on competition. Unfortunately, the same goes with the Church, it should be a stronghold for community but it is not. Parish become kind of “spiritual service points” for individuals and they are not any more expressions of community. The same with life long education. This pattern is preserved and practiced by the elites, needs in terms of recognition does not get to regular ordinary people.

P 3 + 1 + mod: The question of the Church and civil society this part of Europe (particularly in Poland) should be examined much deeper. Is it just another competitor for our time and energy, or is it more a generic space and source of motivation for various activities? One should remember which role it had during communist time, it was much more than place of worship! It created a protected space, an umbrella for social and political activities, is there a way to bring at least some of this back?

Group 2

P 4: A very important aspect of any activity is “enlightened” self-interest. Eventually, groups like consumers, professional associations etc will grow and it is important to ensure that the state will not treat them as rebels but more, as a natural “counterbalance” to its own power. It is misleading to use rhetoric of “common good”, it is rather a natural expression of differences of interest within society. It lies in its nature and I believe those activities have its own internal dynamic engine and there is no urgent need to stimulate them. More complicated and needed are forms of “public altruism”. My students are very much expressing these needs for collective experience, however in my opinion there is no need for motivating especially young people but rather creating a space. The educational system is very much about competition rather than cooperation, however, they have to find their own way.

P 9: It goes even deeper, there is a certain pattern of bringing kids up. It is true that parents are often working very hard, trying to organize extra-curricular activities (swimming pool, language lessons etc.) but there is not so much effort to create opportunities for collective experiences for kids (like it used to be in scouting etc.). There is simply not enough time for it And kids lack after school experiences of this type. Actually there is not enough situations of collective responsibility for “anything” - colleagues, territory, tree, pets - whatever. Without this it is hard to gain those skills afterwards.

P 8: Those activities are important even in pre school age. Those are “golden hours” of encouraging (or discouraging) certain patterns of collective behaviors.

P 3: At the same time, young people are in fact looking for that kind of collective experience, there is an authentic need for it. For example, WOSP (the large polish Great Orchestra of Christmas charity) is attracting people very much beyond “the usual suspects”, but being involved in a one day activity like fund raising for WOSP is simple. It is apparently much more complicated to “get into” many NGOs, you have to “climb the ladder” often with not very satisfying or useful tasks (making the coffee - type of jobs). NGOs are often not volunteer friendly, it is a shame.

P 2: Part of the problem is that many young people want to be part of already established cool, prestigious NGOs, why would they not rather do something in the own neighborhood, is it not cool enough?

P 3: What I see quite often is kind of narcissistic attitude among young people, they believe that they can and have to be famous, cool, recognized, awarded. Humble, patient, small and not so vocal activities are not so popular among young people.

P 2: What is also inhibiting people from undertaking civic activities is bureaucracy. Bottom-up indigenous initiatives are immediately quenched by regulations, you have to fight your way “up the hill” for even the simplest of initiatives, like planting a tree for example. There is an obvious need for deregulation. –Another idea regards the creative use of networks, in the US, they are contemplating the idea of something inspired by the old-fashioned “public work” that was organized during the pre-war big crisis. Having access to a network, one can become a teacher or mentor, networks are organic but they still can be cultivated.

P 1: It is true, networks represent huge potential and sometimes you need very little resources to trigger lots of energy. But this is a very delicate issue, in a sense it is a living organism.

P 5: The role of media is extremely important, the message about civil society is inconsistent. There is no “brand” for it like Solidarnosc used to be. People are not familiar with the whole concept of the third sector. However, the role of media is also ambivalent, they are very strong and they create their own institutions and brands, portraying themselves as the core of civil society but often overshadowing activities of organizations. Particularly in Poland this 4th power is in fact very strong with all good and bad consequences’.

P 4 + mod: Maybe we need to build new relations with media as we all agree that there is a need for civic education. It might take a form of dedicated cycle of programs in form of “How to do it?”. It regards those elementary social and civic skills, eventually it will happen.

P 3: Media people often perceive it as competition, they have their “own” campaigns etc. There is a need for huge educational effort among media leaders.

P 2: We can complain about mainstream media, but we should also be able to harvest possibilities created by other tools, on the internet you can have your own youtube TV channel within days. I’m also a bit sceptical about the influence of media, at least in a certain “marketing” role, I see so many posters, appeals, campaigns that I am lost and “over prompted”. Then there is one more issue, the role of business in supporting civil society. The concept of CSR is still shallow in Poland and reserved for philanthropy, altogether business is often perceived as something “dirty” and by definition focused only on its own interest. Nobody believes in any form of altruistic behaviors of businesses.

P 6: I remember being in UK with a group of Polish MPs. they were listening to people from the Home Office trying to describe the phenomenon of social enterprises. For our MP the most unbelievable thing was that they operate in UK without any special tax incentives.

P 7: Sometimes it might be useful to use even “artificial” incentives, they may sometimes turn into something real. This was the case in Italy with alternative military services for so-called “objectors”.

European issues
Social contracting
Crisis will nourish activism
Community centres



Group 1

During the next 10 year, we will assist the growing of the social services sector, NGOs working in this field will grow. In general, all the aspects related to local communities’ development will be important. The participation rate related to social issues will also grow.

Some participants believed that the number of NGOs active in democracy field will decrease because of lack of

funding. Other participants considered that the democracy NGOs may continue to grow, however moving on to more "European" issues.

Other opinions: social contracting will grow and the system will modernize. Also the membership structure for NGOs will grow and NGOs will be better at representing citizens' interests and we will assist the acceleration of development of grassroots organizations.

All participants appreciated that the present crisis context will have also a positive side, as NGO expertise will become more valued. The present crisis could also be seen as an opportunity for NGOs in terms of human resources, as they hope not as many people will migrate from the NGO sector to the business sector.

The existence of people with strong leadership skills, clear ideas and ability to motivate others is very important, and there is a need for more people able to promote and fight for a cause.

If they were to invest for the future - participants identified several strategic areas for civil society development. Some participants considered that the most interesting investment should be in improving the image and increase the trust of citizens in NGOs. This can be done through campaigns to promote successes and unsuccessful projects, or through building up a special television station covering citizens/NGOs issues. Other participants considered that a smart investment could be in grassroots initiatives, e.g. through a special fund created to support those initiatives. Other opinions stressed the importance of investing in education: civic education in schools, but also education for business leaders and politicians to learn more about the NGO sector. Training of leadership for NGOs was also considered strategic and one participant stressed paying a lot of attention to the community level and that investment in community development programs is strategically important.

Group 2

Participants believed that they will assist the development of a "user generated state", where citizens have better access to governance. Also participants from this group made comments related to the present crisis situation, saying that the crisis will force the participation and activism to grow.

Other opinions: the structural funds management will influence the relationship between civil society and the state. In Romania there will be a group of big organizations, more or less looking like corporations, for the rest there will be assistance for development of small and local organizations. Volunteer activities will grow, and charity behavior of Romanians will change, marketing will become very important.

As strategic investment, participants mentioned civic education for children and youth, investment in development of the civic space such as more community centers. A general education program for citizens could also be interesting, other participants mentioned investment in educational programs for journalists as well as human resources assistance for small organizations.

Judicial power
Information flows
Economic independence
Local philanthropy



Group 1

Inevitably, judicial power has to be reformed and depoliticized in the near future. It will also be necessary to monitor compliance with the Antidiscrimination Act. Further necessities will be to extend the legislative opportunities for citizens and NGOs to participate in decision-making processes regarding public matters, and shift democracy in Slovakia towards deliberation.

As for civil society it will be very important to maintain its ability to generate ideas and different viewpoints, influence public discussions and create public policies. It will be crucial to create an environment suitable for the functioning of organizations, and for individuals providing feedback on the running of the country. In the future, this ability should get all the way to the regional and community levels.

With respect to the social services sphere, the biggest challenge will be to find and create fair environment for provision of social services by all partners, excluding manifestations of injustice, favoritism or political corruption. In addition, it will be necessary to create space for financial support from EU sources, resources from the state, entrepreneurs or individuals for projects, ideas, and methodologies representing innovations in the area of social services provisioning.

The civil sector will face more challenges including re-establishment of mutual communication and information flows, bringing together active people from various environments and cultures, as well as have to make an effort to achieve positive perception of civil society by the public and submit common solutions from various regions up to the EU level.

Yet another challenge for our society is the creation of a space for economically independent citizens and their work or business activities, decreasing the amount of administrative work in dealing with public sector. Also interference by the state and public institutions with the lives of individuals in general will have to be decreased.

Group 2

It is necessary that activists - individuals as well as institutions, are able to bring issues to a successful end on all levels. This means that active citizens have to get legal advice and other help from specialists, architects, city planners, doctors, etc. It will be necessary to support active citizens and help them get their cases to the media in order to enable them address new activists more efficiently and help them inform the public about their successes.

Supporting the infrastructure for civil activists from local independent sources is another big challenge. Volunteering and philanthropy will definitely remain among topics for discussion. Both of them demonstrate civil activism and represent an important independent basis of financial resources for civil society.

In the future, civil sector will also have to tackle the problem of lack of young leaders. Activists are getting old, they are exhausted and this results in a crisis of alternative thinking, absence of elites in science, culture, politics, as well as absence of ability to address issues and get people involved.

In the future, civil society will have to make a decision probably preceded by a very difficult discussion, regarding the existence of infrastructure for active citizens and its institutional backbone. Advantages of the existence of infrastructure stand in contrast to the evil the infrastructure, or rather its bad performance, may bring to civil society. The problem of financing such institutions or structures considerably limits their occurrence.

Democratization of the communal sphere in Slovakia, thorough decentralization of public administration and removal of some well functioning civil mechanisms from the central administration to administrations on the local level, represent a great challenge for civil society. At present the budgets and powers of towns, villages and regional self-governments can be compared with those of the central government. Another important issue is legislation enabling people to participate in administration of public matters, have secured access to information and access to decision-making via participation in administrative proceedings.

Civil society will have to solve the question of effective spreading of information; the existing eSpace provides completely new forms of communication. On one hand it makes communication faster and more efficient, on the other such communication is impersonal and value oriented, and civil society will have to come to terms with this fact.

Making the inter-sectoral collaboration more efficient in the future may shift civil society from dealing with the consequences of problems to preventing them. This will place higher demands especially on the other two sectors and their prejudices against civil society. Last but not least, civil society will have to come to terms with globalization of Slovak society which will be another big challenge.

What are the changes and trends that affect the future of civil society?

Fraud and corruption
environment of freethinkers



Group 1

Dominating the discussion was the subject of social resource privatization, including local authorities alleged of purchasing votes at elections and establishing and funding own-purpose-serving NGOs, corruption of the juridical authority etc. Almost everyone established a return to some pre-modern lifestyles, a “freaky-pre-modern bandit culture” and a new feudalization was mentioned.

Group 2

On the one hand, the participants perceived civil society as newly-emerging through them as individual activists, and on the other hand, their own realization was significant for them and they do not complain about it. They appear optimistic about the future as they believe that, after all, society is bound to normalize; furthermore they believe they have the opportunity to form an environment of freethinkers.

Civic culture
Reducing the gap politics - CS



Group 1

Mod: Who could do something, what are the necessary steps – a “civic culture” is the key word but we should be more specific. Today participating in open forums, signing petitions, participating demonstrations, etc are very rare. Schools should be one of the main areas of practicing these skills and a place where students learn advocacy and interest protection.

P 4: I agree that education system has a key role to educate the students for the active citizenship.

Mod: What can we do to make the interest representation and advocacy real? What can we do if the schools socialize children for assimilation and avoiding conflicts? How can we reduce the gap between the politics and the civil society?

P 4: Do you know what an ordinary child hears at home? S/he hears that there was the KISZ (Young Communists) but it was a disaster. What do they hear at school? The director belongs to FIDESZ, the head master belongs to the MSZP - so it is a disaster as well. How could a self respecting children’s movement evolve in this environment?

Mod: Are there movements that could be models?

P 3: I am sure that they exist. I know the youth area and issues very well and this tertiary socialization area (after the family and schools), is a good area for it. In the first and second areas, a stick power controls the children. In the tertiary area there are patterns of recreation and no predestine power, the youths can choose plazas, internet, motor gangs, and contemporary groups. Obviously we have a lot of tasks in this area; us who are civic organizations, state and businesses. I think it is a good area to teach them what advocacy and interest protection is, because it is very difficult to teach them in the framework of schools because of the predestine power which does not allow this processes. In this way, a „normal” society could be created.

P 2: There were a lot of local protest movements from 2000, which can see beyond their local interests and find allies among similar communities or national movements. It is a positive process but comparing to a stable democracy it is not enough, it is an aborted situation. I do not agree that de-politization is the solution, as I see it - this is the problem instead, there is a culture of „politics is disgusting” in Hungary. If we play a republic, we should be citizens, have self-respect and have an opinion on public issues. It is not needed to be party members, but it is needed to have minimal civic knowledge and to use those tools necessary to be involved in decision-making processes. A culture of cooperation is necessary also, I am sad to see that very often the elite who normally speak for civil society, talks about itself. These organizations are different than organizations in Western Europe: they have insufficient number of members, they do not have internal democratic rules, and these organizations operate as companies: there is management, there are donors who behave like quasi owners, and they usually just like to prove their existence. This is a big burden on our democracy.

Mod: Do you know of any potential ways and steps to change it? Maybe this financial crisis can cause that individuals and local communities will be more important, or is this an illusion?

P 4: The crisis will not assist this process. It came from outside, it is a mass of global interactions; so turning inside is a wrong answer. We must have these interactions but our answers should be local ones, based on local needs and local demands.

Life is risky and unpredictable
Social economy
Investigating our values
Changing role of state
Cyber communities



Group 1

Main issues raised by participants: life is becoming more risky. The current crisis might unfold itself into unpredictable directions: in some scenarios we will become even more egoistic, self-protecting and preoccupied with survival strategies. On the other hand, it might also trigger positive processes of solidarity and mobilization.

The Crisis will force us to sort out our fundamental values again, we would probably be more concerned about stability and the values of “belonging” and responsibility. Paradoxally things and issues which are often raised by civil society organizations might become more important than ever, for example: mutuality, reciprocity, trust as an economic factor, social economy, different concepts of wellbeing etc.

We are lacking habits and practices for a non-instrumental debate about our own values. Third sector people often think that they are somehow immune from difficult questions about their own axiology, it is high time for debates around the question know why? rather than know how? There is also the important and growing issue of so-called institutional isomorphism of third sector organizations, since they are more and more contracted by the administration they are under constant pressure to standardize and are somehow forced to be more and more opportunistic and bureaucratic. Third sector should protect its unique features.

Group 2

P 4: First of all there is a need for understanding the changing role of state, as it is still perceived to be responsible for delivering all solutions. Obviously, it is an anachronism, not only in Poland is this deeply imprinted in us. Probably what will change first (in fact it has already started to change) are behaviors, more and more we have to rely on ourselves for education, health etc. However, we are still trapped by our language and it will take a while to change it, not only the language in society but also the official technocratic rhetoric of state bureaucracy which is portraying itself as the source of solutions for all problems. Asking citizens to get self-organized is perceived as presenting itself as “weak”, the only exceptions are catastrophe like situations. Who knows maybe current crisis will be so deep that it will force a renaissance of the old and forgotten concept of mutuality or reciprocity (for example on credit markets) rather than belief in state protection. This would be a chance for self-help. Obviously, for these concepts to work they need to be rooted in a culture of mutuality with access to social capital, which is not very so available.

P 2: There is definitely a need for the third sector to think beyond structural funds planning periods. It is true that funds are available now, but what will happen afterwards? NGOs are very dependent and patronized by the public administration which distributes those funds and the system often awards opportunistic behaviors. This is dangerous in the long run.

P 2: Technology is obviously one of the main drivers of change and my belief is that in Poland the traditional third sector is not “catching up” with development. This does not say that individuals are not using it, but with this “gap”, individual cyber activism is weakening NGOs who are not adapting fast enough. It creates alternative channels while in many cases it would rather be possible to fuel new energy into existing one.

P 1: Obviously, huge development of cyber communities is going on, of course in most cases they are of a very specific nature: they exist mainly for fun, entertainment and self-interest, but in the end they play a very important social role again both negative and positive. Cyber communities often create very complex social forms, they generate specific form of social capital and of course also so-called “dirty” capital. Too often, however, they are treated just as dangerous alternative to the real world, while sometimes they are influencing the very real world and they can help organize real activities of people. By the way there are more and more NGOs (however not in Poland so far) which use the virtual world to interact with people, recruit and educate. Technology provides powerful tools for free and lowers the cost of operation as well as democratizes access to information.

P 2 + 4: There is also one extremely important issue, the participation of Poland in taking global responsibility. We still have one of the lowest portion of our budget dedicated to developmental goals, and public debate on issues such as EU agricultural subsidies in relation to problem of famine in developing countries is non existing. We perceive ourselves as a “poor” country and subject of much desired and demanded help from others. We are not paying our debts of solidarity to others.

P 2: Another interesting question is about the process of emergence of post materialistic values. How much time do we need in Poland to witness the growing of subtle concepts like quality of life which are measured not only in economic terms, but rather in e.g. quality of food, identity, public space, esthetics, time.

P 4: The big question in my opinion is whether collectively we would be better described as a post-communist society or a pre-consumptionist and purely materialistic society, being the first generation who can freely consume the outcomes of their efforts.

P 6: Sooner or later we will collectively face the question of meaning of life, happiness etc. We need to answer it in a deeper sense and feel that we need others - community.

*Democracy deficit
Social communication
Role of internet
Public consultation*



Conclusions Group 1 & 2

Civic transformation happened abruptly in Romania at the beginning of 90s. Social, political and technological factors converged to facilitate the development and transformation of Romanian civil society. At the present (after 20 years) there is a solid landscape of civil society, populated with all kind of associative forms and collective actions in Romania – NGOs, coalitions and federations, trade unions, informal association, big, national organizations and small community organizations, media associations, bloggers etc.

Still, despite the progresses, there is a democracy deficit in Romania and both civil society structure and government should tackle this issue seriously. The level of citizens' trust in NGOs is very low (under 30%), the level of citizens participation in political activities through voting is also very low, in general the citizen is alienated from participatory activities, political or apolitical. Strengthening participatory associations may be the key to political as well civil

revitalization.

The level of civic activism level is also considered very low. Participants of the focus group sessions had real difficulties to indicate examples of outstanding "civic entrepreneurs" - individuals or organizations. It was considered that in Romania there often is a sort of "civic reaction" something below civic activism. For civic activism it is necessary to have solid civic values and civic education, civic activism should be a systematic activity, based on values and conducting our attitudes and behavior in society.

Social communication is critical to a healthy civil society, the practice of leading and managing newspapers, TV stations, opinion magazines etc have a substantial impact on civic education, associative behavior and civic mobilization. Without necessarily intending to do so, Romanian media adopted the wrong strategies for portraying and gathering information about civil society activities, encouraging unrepresentative leadership and ridiculing organized group activities. Mass media should become more self-conscious about their own civic impact and responsibilities.

A special emphasis was placed on discussing the role of internet in supporting and encouraging civil society development and civic attitudes and behavior. Internet is a wonderful opportunity for social communication and a sort of support for a civic space, where we can express our ideas, but is only a tool, internet cannot replace the face-to-face communication.

Civil society development and civic transformation are linked with governance reform and electoral politics (electoral system reform). In Romania there was a lot of progress in the last 20 years in terms of governance reform. The civil society structure is involved in decision-making processes, at least formally. Public consultation has become a legal requirement for all governmental structures, however still there are a lot of things to do in order to modify the working of government and politics. Institutions, movements and associations could have a more prominent role in public consultation with the government and Parliament.