A blue bird is perched on a white fabric, possibly a shirt, against a grey background. The bird is facing right, and its head is turned slightly towards the viewer. The fabric is draped and has some folds. The background is a solid, light grey color.

Keeping up with the changing world - how can we guarantee the viability of civil society?

What are NGOs – citizen based interest actors or subsidized project businesses? Who do they serve? How can we keep **civic identity** and **values** under the pressure of a contract-driven culture? What about change, new leaders and joint action beyond projects? Reaching beyond the discussion of financial sustainability and looking at other issues is crucial to ensuring the long term **viability** of civil society organizations.

Moderator Pavlina Kalousova (Mod): This session is called “Keeping up with the changing world” and when I think about how to apply this to the NGO world it can be quite a crucial issue. Before coming here I was moderating a discussion between the Czech government and the NPO sector about the new law that’s being prepared. 90% of the NGOs are not in support of the law. I would say that’s not because they don’t like the idea, but they just refrain from liking anything that is new and they are afraid what this will bring. It reminded me of the discussion we had about the One Percent Law four years ago, it was not passed in the Czech Republic because the NPO sector was afraid. One of the arguments for this fear was that if the law were passed the NGOs might lose state subsidies. What is happening now during the financial crisis is that the state is reducing the subsidies, and there is no One Percent Law in the Czech Republic. This kind of lessons we are learning every day, that not liking change might not be a good argument for us to do nothing. I prepared for you a story, which has four main characters: two little mice, two people, the maze and the cheese. The story is about change and I will tell it to you later. First we will divide into groups and write down three things that are changing in the world and three things that are not changing.



Group representative (Gr): What changes: legal frameworks, forms of NGO interaction and means of communication, the way NGOs act, becoming more professional, more like businesses, and the way NGOs deliver their services.

Universal inequality of assets does not change

Gr: Three things changing: sea levels because of climate change, communication technologies and the balance of global and local, we feel more connected to the global world and less connected with the local. What does not change is: death, the level of happiness of people and inequality in terms of assets.

Demography is changing

Gr: In our group we think economic systems, communication and civil society are changing, because people are older and in relation to the economic systems we are out of money. What is not changing is people’s basic needs, inequality and racism for example.

Gr: Points that are changing: climate, economy and technology. What is not changing: basic personal needs for e.g. food, basic human nature also referring to emotions, everyone can feel happy, sad, be aggressive, and the third point is that change is constant.

Mod: Thank you, and now which are the biggest drivers of change? [Summing up:] People. technology, business... Now how can these changes and these things that do not change interfere with your professional and private lives?

Lead change or adapt

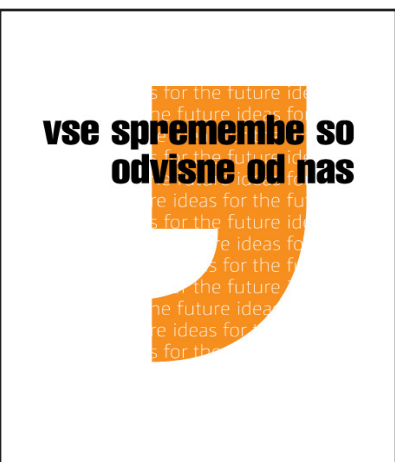
Gr: After the discussion about what is our role as different NGOs, the summary is that you can either lead the change like innovators and entrepreneurs, being upfront and driving change. Some of us work with NGOs who are trying to influence what happens. With technology, on the other hand, we were generally saying that we have to adapt to it, we follow it, we cannot really influence it but we try to keep up and adapt. With regards to the non-change we said change is constant and we just have to accept it and make peace with it. We cannot ignore it but also we cannot do much about it. Our NGO tries to take advantage of the challenges and keep up with modern technologies, us-

ing modern communication. We try to be more efficient and actively transfer the economic system as well as stabilize the bridge loans to other NGOs. With regards to climate change we try to inform and change our behavior like for example with the heating system. Our NGOs are not taking as many risks as we did before. ¹

Civil society has a role in monitoring use and abuse of technology

Gr: Regarding sea levels which are changing we think that civil society does a lot of advocacy, conservation, preservation and recycling programs, alternative energy plus helping communities live with higher sea levels. With regards to communication technology civil society looks at how to make use of it and some civil society organizations provide technical support. We also thought civil society has a role in monitoring its use and abuse perhaps. The level of happiness - we struggled over; since it's not changing we thought we could try to convince people that they should moderate their materialism and consumerism because it's not going to make them any happier to try to raise the level after a certain point. We had some really good ideas about changing death as we talked about NGOs role in improving the quality of life before death, making death easier and dignified, addressing people's fear of death and preparing for the afterlife.

Gr: We were discussing values, needs, forms of delivery and communication and what organizations are doing in these fields. We are protecting and promoting values, we are helping respond to the needs of people and, talking about communication, we work a lot in the area of awareness raising and educating people. We are also responding by creating new forms of organizations, new structures that should address new problems and issues.



Mod: If you see businesses and their strategies, they are all talking about change as a good thing. Most of the marketing of businesses and global corporations is based on change and what it brings to our life – and it's positive. When you read programs of the political parties, how they will change our lives – it's positive. When you listen to the new music it's about change and it's trying to make us happy. However, if you listen to NGOs and civil society, sometimes we talk only about the dark side of our lives, we use complicated heavy wording, which is in some kind of opposition with the rest of the communication people are hearing. May be we could also think about positive things, and how we can talk to people in a language that they can understand.

Organizations are not resistant to change they are producing it

Participant (P): I would disagree that there is such a negative and pessimistic attitude and resistance to change among organizations, I would rather say that the organizations are producing the change; they are stimulating others and showing other people that change is something good. We work with our beneficiaries and society that might be resistant, because introducing something new is always difficult. But I feel that saying that business believes change is positive and civil society says that change is negative, I wouldn't put it as black and white.

Mod: It was my role to make it black and white, I was not saying that's what they do; I was talking about how they communicate. Now to the story about the mice and the cheese. So if you don't know the story I will just make it very

A story about cheese, mice and people

brief. These are the four main characters of the story, 2 humans and 2 mice. Once upon a time there were these four characters that wanted to be happy, and they knew that they were only going to be happy if they find the cheese in the maze, so they were running in the maze looking for cheese day after day but they couldn't find it. One day they ran into something called station C, where they found a wonderful storage of cheese, it was delicious and they loved it. They were going there every day because they knew there was enough cheese to satisfy their needs, and they thought they are happy because they didn't have to run through the maze all day looking for cheese. They just knew where it was, so they didn't put a lot of effort into it, they didn't dress or put their sneakers on, they just went in their slippers because they knew that the cheese is there. The storage of the cheese was diminishing and one day they realized that all the cheese was gone, there was no cheese anymore. They didn't know what to do. Anyway, the mice behaved naturally and said ok, the old cheese is not here, so let's find new cheese. And so they started running in the maze and they found new cheese in station G, which was a much bigger storage than station C. They found camembert, mozzarella, cheddar and all kinds of wonderful cheese and it made them even happier. The people instead of going after the mice, started to analyze. They were questioning who did this to us, how did we deserve that someone took the cheese from us and they became very hungry. They were very upset because somebody took away their happiness, and instead of going to find new cheese they got stuck in the old station, wondering who took the cheese. Let's talk about how the NGO sector may look like in 10 years if the old cheese is gone and there is no other cheese. What does the new cheese look like and how can we find it?

New partners, establish a social enterprise, change profile or focus

Gr: We came up with four suggestions: number one is to find the cow to make our own cheese - via income from a social enterprise, playing in the market etc. Number two is to become friendlier to the mice, who obviously have a superior intelligence since they've got new cheese - that would mean finding more partners who have resources, which we don't have, improving communications, our good name and legitimacy. The third is to change ourselves into mice and enjoy the cheese together, that would mean becoming a business or a government contractor. The fourth is to switch our need from cheese to chocolate and look for completely different resources; maybe some we don't even know exist. Chocolate is more attractive to some of us, particularly since I am allergic to cheese, really.

Gr: What will happen to people if they don't adapt and go looking for cheese, our conclusion is that death will come for this particular NGO and this is the main outcome. One donor disappears and then this might go further to affect other donors, and the rep-



It is a market of NGOs, some will survive

utation of this particular NGO and other NGOs as a sector in general - so this is a danger for the whole sector. We have to be flexible to respond to changes and isolation is one more consequence, which might come up. I believe that organizations should be competitive, and the better organizations should stay in the market and organizations that don't operate well and don't fulfill their clients' needs or respond to change appropriately should go. We should also try to educate donors, so if donors or funders or institutions that invest choose areas that are no longer important or valid, we also should try to tell them that this or that is not a problem in our community, it is not really a problem for this group of people.

Gr: We basically came up with three things: to learn how to make your own cheese, or convince people to bring cheese to you by organizing them, or, finally, to convince factories that make cheese to provide you with a portion of their cheese - so corporate social responsibility.

Increasing local funding

Gr: For us the new cheese would be people acting at the local level - funding becoming more local and being dependent on private individuals or civil society initiatives being more self sufficient maybe in the shape of making a social business. The new cheese is more social engagement from individuals also in the shape of corporate volunteering or volunteering during your retirement. Cheese that grows locally and is not imported, never runs out.

Mod: Is this in line with the changes that are happening outside? What are you describing - the new cheese or the end of the old cheese? Does it connect with your discussion of the economic systems, sea levels, global-local, aging, means of communications, environment, professional NGOs? What kind of tools do we offer to the others to participate?

P: One of our points was to improve communications, outreach, sense of social roots and legitimacy - all those things you need if you want more people to participate in your activities. Financially, I am not sure but we've tried for many, many years and it hasn't worked, it's difficult

Mod: What kind of recommendations would you give to people or NGOs to get from here to there?

Constant monitoring

P: NGOs should constantly monitor their work and make sure the solutions they propose are not harmful in the long term. Constantly monitor their objectives and their mission, the methodology and the solutions and connect their capacity to change according to the analysis. Don't analyze just for the sake of analyzing, use local resources, be creative with the resources and make sure that you become sustainable.

P: We thought of three strategies how to deal with cheese becoming less available. One way is to diversify resources, including social enterprise like "eat not only cheese but other things also". Reach out to large number of people and come back to your roots if you started as a grassroots NGO. This way you are less dependent on large grants from foundations, government subsidies or corporate financing if you receive support from private citizens. Finally, increase the capacity within the NGO, keep the human capital - if you have people trained how to find cheese and they leave this is not good, try to keep people

and upgrade them.

Mod: Other ideas: stay curious, be persistent, stay focused, take advantage of changes and technology, keep learning, take risks and look out for local possibilities.

More visibility in society

P: NGOs should try to be more visible in society, speak more about themselves: what they do, how they do it and why they do it. Be more proactive and innovative. Learn a lot from business models, Engage more individual donors instead of relying on grants or institutional donations, and cooperate among each other so that you can build a sector that has a political voice and can influence legislation.

Move with the cheese and enjoy it

Mod: To finish the story, these are some of the important moments that happened to the people because the mice went out and found the cheese. Some recommendations from the people: the more important your cheese is to you the more you want to hold on to it. You have to smell the cheese often so you know when it's getting old because keeping old beliefs like the cheese in storage C, does not lead you to new cheese. At the end when people realized that either they are going to die or they have to move on to find the new cheese, they realized that the best thing you can do is to move with the cheese and enjoy it. This story is called "Who took my cheese?" and is used a lot by corporations to teach people to deal with change. It was given to me by a CEO of a company that had to restructure the whole company and was saying that people are going in the hallways complaining how it was wonderful before the changes, and he realized that he had to teach people that change is not bad, it is normal and natural.

