Carpathian Foundation

Carpathian Civil Society Platform

**Strategy and Feasibility Study
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PARTNERS

Acknowledgements

The vision

- The Platform and the Hub is driven by that common vision to strengthen vibrant, pluralistic, and rights-based civil society in the territory of the Carpathian Euroregion (the Carpathians.)
- The Platform and the Hub is an instrument to realize this mission by offering a framework for cooperation between those civil society organizations (CSOs), which are working primarily with grassroots organizations and with vulnerable groups.

Goals

- To coordinate and synergize the single and isolated efforts of CSOs, amplify the effect of their activity at local, regional and inter-regional levels

- To generate, disseminate and mainstream innovative solutions for resolving socio-economic problems in order to serve better their constituencies and articulate the needs of silent communities.

Common place -Common ground

- The Platform and Hub is an area-based organization embedded in a geographically, historically, culturally and sociologically contiguous border region, the Carpathians, which is a common place and ground for cooperation.

Common values

- social and regional solidarity
- providing equal opportunity
- social justice
- social inclusion
- respect and protect natural, cultural and ethnic diversity
- contribution to the public/social good.
- partnership with local, regional authorities and other actors, such as media, businesses, academia
- dissolvent existing national and ethnic prejudices

Main challenges societies are facing

- increasing of social and regional disparities; growing gaps between regions within a country, rising social and ethnic tensions; migration
- increasing omnipotence of state, weakening local competencies and autonomies
- weakening of rule of law, democratic institutions, and the endangered independence of media;
- lack of governments' accountability and transparency, and rising corruption ("crony capitalism");
- low level of citizens engagement, high passivity, apathy; lack of social solidarity;
- increasing Euroscepticism, isolationism and growing extremism
- increasing mistrust in state institutions, political parties and between citizens ("the mistrust we trust");
- increasing governmental intolerance towards social autonomies, citizen initiatives, and intimidation of civil society.

Challenges in regional context

- These challenges are even more powerful in such remote/peripheral areas like the Carpathians, and it have its effect on the civil society and on those organizations, which represents civil society.

- These organizations are in disadvantage compared to the situation of organizations seated in the capital cities, although the demands for their effective work can be considered higher in such remote and peripheral, mainly rural areas like border regions.

Identified common external challenges

1. Unfavorable or even hostile socio-political environment

- Controversial governmental decisions show political indifference and neglect towards civil society
- stigmatization of civil society organizations, as "foreign agent" (Hungary)
- party political dependence of CSOs; favoritism, only those selected CSOs have access to resources,   which are close to the government; advantages of government-conform CSOs
- the weakening of competencies of local authorities; increasing dependence of local   governments   from central authorities, which results in the emptying of local democracy; there is no cooperation between CSOs and local governments
- extremely quickly changing legislation, complicated and bureaucratic regulations; little assistance to help to adhere to new conditions

External challenges

- 2. Challenging social environment

- peoples' indifference towards public affairs; lack of motivation, apathy;
- target group is closed, hard to involve and activate them
- increasing social exclusion, especially in the case of Roma, poor, and people with disability, etc.
- emigration of innovative young people (they vote by foot)
- hate speech is an everyday thing

External challenges- Finance

- lack of domestic and independent funds, narrowing funds, financing opportunities; increasing competition for funding resources
- EU Structural Fund sources dried up (no new open call for NGOs) but, at the same time, weak absorption capacity of NGOs
- lack of local philanthropy; there is no effective incentive scheme for giving
- lack of small grants scheme, e.g. lack of funds for start-up initiatives
- Donor driven programs; requirements of some donors confront the goals of NGOs and their members; they promote topics which are artificial and not important for the society; donors' priorities do not match the priorities of the NGOs
- shrinking income generation possibilities; NGOs are cut out providing services
- lack of stable income reduces effectiveness of personnel work.
- Instable financing of NGOs (it's not about financial sustainability but about irregular financing
- lack of financial and technical support available for citizens' mobilization .

Internal organizational challenges

- lack of cooperation among civil society organizations; there are no cooperating networks and there is no information flow between organizations
- the importance of credibility, visibility, and transparency is not recognized and addressed by NGOs sufficiently or, if it recognized, there is no skill, capacity, and knowledge how can it be promoted and improved (legitimacy)
- insufficient presence of NGOs and their activities in media; low PR capacity of the organizations; poor communication skills
- lack of strategic thinking, planning and organizational development
- lack of partnerships with the foreign NGOs working in the same fields (most of cross-border projects are implemented by the organizations specializing on cross-border cooperation but not on vulnerable groups)
- lack of volunteers; narrowing possibilities to support volunteers professionally/financially; lack of knowledge on how to involve volunteers and work with them;
- lack of entrepreneurial and management competencies
- shortcomings of human resources within NGOs ; burn off existing team, lack of leadership, no career path inside NGOs.

Guiding principles of the HUB

1. **Complementarity: build on what already exist.**
- The Hub leverages existing human, technical, and technological resources of CSOs within the Carpathians via mutually beneficial cooperation
- supports existing and emerging local civil society, community, and citizens led activities and inspire social innovation.
- Its programming focuses around existing resources and on a better use of existing human, technical, etc. resources in the framework of cooperation of which mathematics is 1 + 1 = 3.

Guiding principles

2. Support grassroots and local actors. The Hub directs its support to organizations and actors who are embedded within the communities they serve. This entails a broadly inclusive definition of civil society as an arena, distinct from the state, the market, and the individual household, created by individuals, groups, and organizations acting together to promote social justice, democracy and eventually common interests in pursuit of social good. This includes, for example, community leaders, civic activists, networks, social movements, media, and others beyond traditionally "organized" civil society and places an emphasis on providing opportunities to the most marginalized groups locally and inter-regionally.

Guiding principles

3. Flexibility: adapt and respond to changing conditions. The Hub aims to respond rapidly to changing conditions and emerging needs and seeks to be flexible and agile to support nascent civil society needs and address new challenges as they arise.

4. participation, social innovation and mutual learning. The Hub facilitates innovation within civil society by supporting civil society to participate in developing new or adapted ways of addressing common challenges. To help driving this, the Hub supports learning across civil society. This focus on innovation of approaches and methodologies will be one of the many means through which the Hub offers unique, timely, and demand driven services that stand apart from other ongoing initiatives.

5.Ensure civil society ownership and accountability. While the Hub depends on donors to drive the initial process and provide initial financing, donors will seek to move away from this active role over time in order to ensure sustainability. The hub will aim to be regionally owned and managed to ensure they best serve the needs of civil society itself.

Roles and services

- The Hub pursues its mission, in line with the guiding principles, by fulfilling four key roles: **facilitator and convener; matchmaker and broker; innovator; advisor and counselor.** As the Hub is owned and driven by civil society, there is an implicit understanding that the Hub and those they serve will work in a participatory fashion.

- The exact role and services of the Hub will be defined, fine tuned and prioritized during a series of local and regional consultations.

As a facilitator and convener

- The Hub partners to encourage knowledge exchange and collaboration by bringing multiple civil society actors together. This may happen through structured events or channels such as organizing conferences, workshops or organically through the provision of a shared workspace to host multiple CSOs.

- Depending on regional needs, temporary "popup hubs" may be established in response to a pressing issue or emerging need

- "Hublets" may be created in localities that require greater proximity to services. As a convener, the Hub may also bring civil society together with other civil society networks, private sector, media,academia or government actors.

As a matchmaker and broker

- the Hub connects individual CSOs or activists that have specific needs with actors that have the expertise, resources, and capacity to support them. This role focuses on creating bi- or multilateral linkages locally and across borders. This may occur through various means: secondment or fellowship programs to promote crosspollination of ideas and skills between organizations; recruitment of "peer ambassadors" (facilitators, coaches) who have the skills and expertise to advise other organizations; or recommendations of third party capacity building programs, trainings, mentorships, coaching, toolkits, or case studies.

As an innovator and sandbox

- The Hub partners with civil society, private sector, academia, and other stakeholders to seek and stimulate new approaches and techniques, and provide a venue, either physical or digital, to receive peer review on and test new approaches to challenges and opportunities.

- The Hub may accomplish this role through working and partnering with non-traditional actors, like innovative start ups, etc.

- The result of this service could include new apps, new fundraising modalities, or new ways for constituency outreach.

As an advisor and counselor

- the Hub partners to provide some amount of information and expertise directly to CSOs in the region, in addition to connecting them with other resources
- Hub includes expertise on innovative tools, technologies, approaches and participatory methods
- Other services may include sharing relevant research with an interested CSO, providing capacity building trainings directly, or advising on challenging issues

Potential service under each role

ROLE	SERVICE
Facilitator & convener to encourage knowledge	Conferences (regular Platform meetings) , communities of practice, and virtual knowledge exchange platforms Shared workspaces (especially serving small/growing CSOs); Popup hubs (temporary convening spaces around emergent issues or in areas facing new challenges to civic space) Hublets (decentralized, and scaleddown or "mini" spaces) Forums with government, private sector, and others

Potential service under each role

ROLE	SERVICE
Matchmaker & broker to pair resources with needs	Peer ambassadors to reach out to CSOs Virtual brokering/ticketing system (IT) for support Secondment and fellowship programs Partnership with international NGOs/donors and regional/local CSOs Connecting media actors and international journalists with CSOs (especially during critical periods of political shifts or crises) Crowdsourcing platforms to help national/local CSOs access funding

Potential service under each role

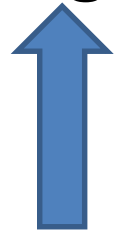| ROLE	SERVICE
Innovator & sandbox to catalyze new tools and approaches	Software development / testing Challenges/Prizes Hackathons to bring various groups together Mobile Mondays Tech Clearinghouse Virtual Platform Digital + Comms Trainings(long distance learning and communication) Expertships

Potential service under each role

ROLE	SERVICE
Advisor & counselor to provide information and expertise	Research guidance Capacity building and training on media, advocacy, technology tools, digital security, or other areas Expert advice on legal enabling environment for civil society and other legal, financial, technology, or other matters

Process and structure

Carpathian Civil Society Platform

Inter-regional Hub

Hublets