

CFs' 100 years around and 20 years in Europe: Less Another Brick in the Wall

Reflections from the CF Study Trip to Slovakia

November 2014

Vadim Samorodov

Time to Reflect

The 2014 study visit to Slovakia – the 5th and the last (in such form) in the row of international experts' trips to CEE countries – was special, like every jubilee date when it's a good time to look back, reflect, and think about where we are and what lies ahead. For me personally this was the second visit to Slovakian CFs after the 12-year break (although I certainly had a chance to meet with numerous meetings with Slovakian CF leaders at various events), and this was a good chance to see where it all started in Europe.

I really appreciate that the organizers provided many opportunities for discussions, debates and reflections and invited nearly all CF representatives from CEE countries.

The whole experience loaded me with lots of food for thought and left me with mixed feelings, which also blended with the impressions from the previous trips to Bulgaria, Poland, Czech Republic and Romania. I'll try to put them together in this paper, which will go way beyond the actual experience in Slovakia and will, as usual, touch global issues related to community philanthropy development in CEE.

The Context: Building the Wall

2014 has been an interesting year. First of all it's the Year of Anniversaries. We celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the world's CF movement and 20 years of community foundations in Europe. 100 years ago, while the US was giving birth to the community philanthropy, Europe fell into the World War that shook and rocked the continent and started the bloodiest century in history.

It is also 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, which signaled the collapse of the communist bloc in Europe and the triumph of liberal values and the market economy, and the end of the Cold War. I find this Anniversary especially important for our discussion, as all of us who gathered in Bratislava went through the process of transformation and sensed it under our skin.

And where are we after 100 years since the WWI and 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall? We are all at the new Cold War, we speak again about a new World War, and we are building the new Wall.

It all looks quite familiar as the usual flow of history, although I would have never imagined a year ago that Russia could be in a state of real war with Ukraine, and more turmoil is yet to come. The world seems to be tired from stability and without having an enemy.

The crisis of 2008 launched many processes as it identified the limit of global growth within the existing status quo. It also disclosed the weaknesses of the global governance in the situation when the decisions and risks taken in global centers have nearly immediate impact for other countries, which had nothing to do with those decisions but had to face and deal with their consequences.

The EU in its current format also creaks from strains of internal discrepancies, as its initial setup of an economic alliance built with the aim of stronger competition has transformed into a big and ever-growing family with adopted “children”, which has so many internal discrepancies that it’s getting less capable to deal with external challenges.

Hence, the world’s tension is growing. For the last few years we’ve seen great number of various cases of social unrest from populist movements of “Occupy the Wall Street” to real revolutions in Arabic countries and Ukraine. Feeling the weakness of the global community, the forces that see the world order differently started openly claiming for their portion of “respect” and influence.

So what will be happening and what we – as community philanthropy activists – can do with it?

First, there will definitely be more load on national governments in terms of finding developmental solutions with less hope for external aid and support, meaning that there will be increasingly vocal call for stronger national leadership. In this situation the CEE countries are in a much weaker position in comparison with Western democracies not only by economic power, but by the fact that the national aristocracy and the class of owners had been eliminated by the communist regime, while the direct democracy that has developed after its fall is incapable to act in the time of crises, because of its populist and “give-me-more-welfare” nature.

Second, there is a clear demand for stronger communities. You think you live safe and don’t touch anyone? The global forces do not care about what you think, and all of a sudden you see clashes and shooting just behind your window. Nowadays nobody is guaranteed against it, and the only tool that can save in such situation is the habit for self-organization and strong civil society capable to get quickly mobilized in case of emergency and to help secure resources and set goals for the time when the development needs to be more gradual.

Civil Society in Reality

In our numerous discussions in Slovakia I heard a phrase that *the whole ‘civil society’ notion was just designed by EU development programs*. It struck me as I thought that *they would really love this phrase in Russia*. However, I understand that while it was said in the heat of discussions there is a certain sense in this phrase: **the terminology and rhetoric that explains what the civil society is may be limited in relation to the contexts in CEE countries**.

For example, should we consider by default that the civil society is always a constructive force focused on building democracy and promoting liberal values? The civil society may hunt witches or inspire ethnic purges with a belief that these acts protect and make their communities stronger. It can be pro- or anti-government and can stand for “human” values or for different values set by religion or ethnic traditions. What I’d like to say is that the **civil society is a mechanism for capturing and promoting the values that make nations or communities stronger at a given point of time**, because this is what citizens want.

In the movie *The Break-Up* I like the scene when Vince Vaughn’s character’s phrase “See I washed the dishes, why are you still mad?” Jennifer Anniston says: “I don’t want you to wash the dishes – I want you TO WANT TO WASH dishes!”

Civil society is when people do not only do things but they believe in and WANT to do them even though otherwise they wouldn’t, in other words it’s a mechanism to sustain values by infusing them into the concept of citizenship.

Values are the goal and the purpose of the civil society, and here we come to the difficult part: what are the values our civil societies should stand for? We all know about the “European values”, but to my mind there is often a confusion of the picture of order and prosperity that we see in Europe, and the values that are shared by people. If we look closer then we’ll see varying and often contradictory value perceptions in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, etc. If we look closer up then we’ll notice that the values around which local civil societies get mobilized are very closely connected to down-to-earth and often cynically pragmatic issues, like sending away migrants and Roma population, fighting against reduction of agricultural subsidies (that actually make the agriculture in richer countries unfairly competitive) and for protecting labor rights. At the same time the civil society helps find compromises with the governments when it’s clear that the only way to address an issue is to reduce the level of welfare (e.g. increased pension age). The civil society in strong nations is not an altruistic phenomenon, but a pragmatic tool for the protection of community wellbeing. It can be aggressive or constructive, but it always has to have values, because otherwise it loses purpose; and the values must match pragmatic interests of the community that lead to its strengthening. Effective governments realize the potential of the civil society and invest in the soft power; the weaker and corrupt ones try to hide from it to avoid questions and monitoring.

In the context of weaker democracies in CEE countries the civil society faces many problems:

- As the civil society concept started getting promotion through international programs, it still has little local buy in and therefore is not fully capable articulate the values and the vision of a strong community;
- Local authorities in their masses consider the civil society an “alien” concept influenced by “external forces” having the purpose to harm them;
- There is NO LOCAL LANGUAGE of describing the civil society and its values, therefore they are considered artificial and not related to specific communities.

These issues define the key task for community philanthropy in emerging democracies: get communities to understand and to WANT the civil society. In order to this the civil society needs to be able to answer the questions like:

- How to develop the pragmatic vision and plan on community development as an attractive and sustainable place for living?
- How to co-exist with the reality that includes corrupt officials, black market business, fake participatory mechanisms, local governance based on hidden agreements between undisclosed men of authority?
- Is there a capacity to offer solutions in situations when there are no good solutions and existing institutions cannot find them?
- Are there leaders capable to collaborate with authorities in taking tough decisions that may negatively affect many people?

If the answers are positive then the civil society plays strong positive role in community. Certainly there are always times for going out on the streets for protests and taking sides in political games but it is the everyday “invisible work” on bridging community forces and mitigating conflicts that leads to community strengthening and therefore builds in the civil society in the local developmental context.

Those were, however, only functional questions that didn’t touch serious contextual dilemmas, which can only be solved by the civil society, such as:

- Limits of tolerance to different cultures, traditions, rituals, lifestyles and dresscodes;
- Dominating traditional culture vs. a cultural melting pot?
- Attitudes to migrants, Roma population, elderly, LGBT, etc.

The answers to these questions are only possible if there is a positive constructive project for strengthening community, allowing for uniting and mobilization.

The community should be able to articulate not only what it doesn't like, but prior to all: WHAT IT WANTS.

What grows in a desert?

The introduction turned out to be quite lengthy, but I wanted to outline my conceptual and philosophical position before going into specific reflections in order to stress that while discussing community philanthropy we should not lose the sense of purpose. Often our discussions are going around the subtleties of community foundation features without actually viewing the CF field within the broader developmental context. I keep on asking the question, whether the CF concept is needed to countries or rather they exist only because the C.S.Mott Foundation runs the CF development program?

If they are needed for the countries, then why they are so small in number and in budgets in CEE countries? Why there are no – as Tomas Krejci put it – forests of tall and beautiful trees that provide oxygen and shelter for various life forms?

My answer to the first question is described in the introductory part – it is the deviant understanding of the value of the civil society in CEE communities as to something that promotes the abstract “European values”, that is usually opposing to authorities and elites, and therefore is perceived “alien” by communities.

I literally heard the word “alien” from both visited CFs in Slovakia in the answer to the question on relationships with and support from authorities.

The second reason is the economic climate that is closer to a desert providing no much nutrition to sustain a variety of life forms. (I apology for further abuse of the botanical metaphor, but I think it provides good visualization of the topic).

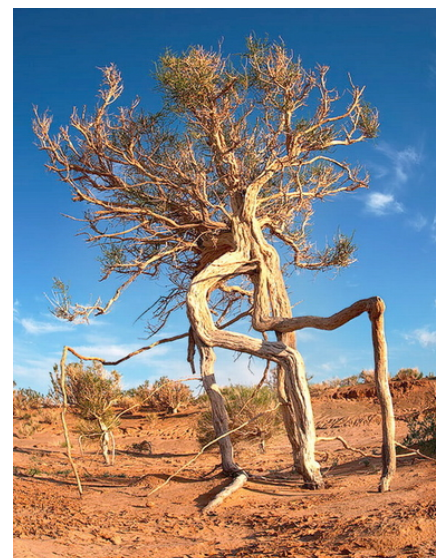
There have been quite substantial investments in creating artificial fields with externally supplied irrigation. The problem is that in case of exhaustion of water supply the artificial fields will die leaving no organisms naturally adapted to the existing climate.

I would say that the value of the Mott's CF development program is that it keeps on searching for and supporting of such “wild” life forms. (I hope I don't offend anyone by using the term “wild” as I would myself prefer to be “wild” rather than “artificially cultivated”).

Logically I'd like to look further at what are those wild forms that can develop in our climate.

From my school course of botany I remember a few trees that grow in deserts, among which the most common are “**Saksaul**” (*haloxylon*) and **camel-thorn**. For example, **Saksaul** doesn't look elegant like an oak or a Burch, and it is useless as a building material or an object of aesthetic contemplation, but in deserts it might be the only type of wood that may be found in deserts through hundreds of miles, and it's an invaluable supplier of food for camels and other animals, while when burnt, its timber provides exceptional heat comparable to coal.

Especially amazing is its “physiology” that provides it with the possibility to grow in harsh climate conditions with extremely

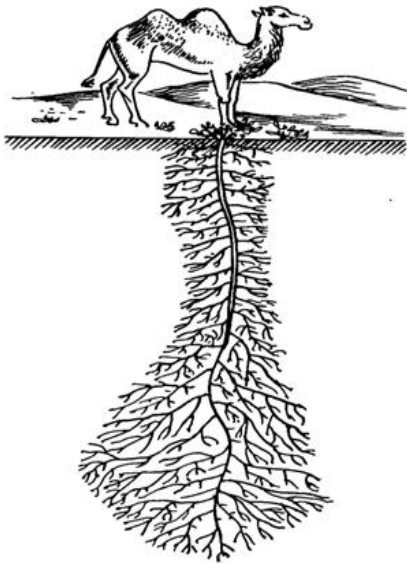


limited supply of water. In order to gain the resources to survive it grows huge – up to 20 meters long – roots that get to the deepest sources of humid.

The harsh life doesn't allow it to grow fast and become tall and nice, but it is an exceptional example of adaptation scarce resources, providing a perfect articulation of survival – **BEING DEEPLY ROOTED**.

It is also important to mention that *saksauls* never grow tall and when chopped do not recover, as their roots are not capable to provide much energy for restoration.

Bardejov Saksaul



Talking about *saksaul* I'd like to jump directly to one of the sites that we visited – the town of Bardejov and the local community foundation, and finally get to the discussion about community foundations in Slovakia.

I hope Josef Jarina, the Director of the Bardejov CF, will excuse me for comparing his foundation with *saksaul*, but I can't find a better comparison to describe it. I wouldn't say that Bardejov looks like a desert with all drawbacks like remoteness from the trans-country railway, over 20% unemployment and stagnating industry it still has a unique "face" as a SPA-resort with a beautiful historical center, which make a great attraction for tourists. There are also a number of quite well-functioning businesses; and the city looks really nice and well preserved.

What I sensed though was something that might be called "*the desert in the heads*". It is not to do with what is done by Josef's organization, as it perfectly took the form of the *saksaul* adaptation, but with the general attitudes of the CF's board members we met at the lunch. It was quite strange for me to hear that the economy in the community doesn't work because of the *socialist heritage* – that enterprises were poorly planned and therefore do not adapt to the market economy. I agree that it could be the case in the 90s, but *25 years have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall!* A quarter of a century is quite significant timeframe to overcome the consequences and have a new generation to come.

In response to my question about engaging the authorities in the CF development the answer was that the mayor "will never understand your concepts of community philanthropy and the civil society, as this is all too "alien" for him". In general the board made an impression of committed but exhausted and disappointed people, who didn't believe that there were any chances to have "life" in this community.

In contrast to that the meeting with initiative groups and nonprofits who do work on the ground was a touch of fresh air. I was absolutely amazed when we met with the group that restored the local *synagogue* and built a large memorial dedicated to the Holocaust victims. Especially moving was the fact that this group didn't comprise Jews (according to them, the last Jew in Bardejov died 10 years ago) and it was a pure historical interest to the history of the community, its heritage and cautions that the history has to contemporary generations. This group raised funds and got support from different sources and it managed to identify and come across the Bardejov Jewish Committee in California. Who would ever thought that such a committee might exist? But they found it, persuaded in the seriousness of their intentions and engaged them in raising funds for this project.

This is a perfect example that **you get what you want if you really want it**.

In general I was impressed by how the Bardejov CF was persistently and instrumentally carrying out its *saksaul* strategy to tap on whatever resources and ideas that exist in the community. Projects focused

on youth, cleanness of the city, renovation of historical objects – this is all precisely what the community expects. The CF also captures ideas of donor engagement – from charitable dinners to city events – and uses them to “spread the roots” and ensure inflow of “life humid” in the community providing it an opportunity to live up to its current budget of around EUR 40,000.

Josef made for us a presentation of the results of the CF’s strategic planning session, at which the key community foundation supporters got together for a retreat to think about where and how the organization should develop. The participants came to concrete proposals on where and how to gain new resources. The target was made the budget increase of EUR 5000.

I was actually shocked by such a low level of, but if applied to the *saksaul* strategy this looks extremely realistic. The *saksaul* knows that it won’t become an oak and it looks into new areas where it can place its roots. The CF knows precisely what it can count on in its “desert” and sets realistic goals. **The *saksaul* never grows tall in height but it can and needs to be lengthy in depth.**

The question is whether it is possible at all to grow oaks that are very sensitive the land and environment? The problem is that the US model came with a vision of an oak, thus motivating with this beautiful image many initiatives groups, but the reality showed that supplying resources for growing the tree that requires much more nutrition than it can get locally leads to disappointment when seeing how they die without getting enough support. The answer is that we need to grow different types of trees.

Let’s now look at it in a more complex way and in dynamics: the *suksaul* supports life of camels and people who live with them, and eventually these people may decide to build an oasis that would create the soil for other types of plants. The “Jew organization” that we met with is a great example of how it can be possible, and we discussed with Josef the idea of potential extending cooperation with the Californian Bardejov Jews Committee to a grant program, say, on ethnic and religious tolerance that would work for the entire community.

At the same time my opinions on programs like “From Active Citizenship to Euro-Citizenship Project” that aim to “bring Europe closer” to people might have negative effect of diluting the local identity within the “Euro-citizenship” project, unless there are very specific practical tools that maybe utilized by communities from sharing. “What is that for me if I become a Euro Citizen?” I would rather that the real perspective is in the focus of finding grounds for the *community pride*. Then there will be a sense to bring resources to the community instead of draining them out.

If we look at a CF as the civil society infrastructure then the crucial point is channeling the civic energy into positive community building initiatives, and the Bardejov CF has such initiatives. One of the greatest examples is the restoration of the city’s *Bastion*, which was handed over by the authorities incapable to run it, to the consortium of civil society organizations backed by the CF. The result is that, while the *Bastion* still needs a lot of work and it still lacks sanitation conveniences, it has electricity and has **life** in it. Sooner or later it will be noticed by business and serious investors, but at the moment the civil society makes the basic “dirty” work and slowly and gradually builds another resource and place of attraction for the community. **When there is life and a positive project – the money will follow.**

Bratislava CF – Small in the Big City

Bratislava was the second site on our group’s visit agenda in Slovakia. CFs in big cities are the ones that I love and hate, as there are a loads of opportunities but I don’t know many successful CFs established in big cities (apart from the US).

My analysis is that the problem with the launching of CFs in big cities in CEE (and most developing countries) is in the fact that even in well off communities we still deal with the “desert in minds” – the weak civil society “alienated” from the community and incapable to offer a positive project, and the lack

of commitment of citizens and the elite to the concept of “the city as my community”. These issues does not allow to build strong “oak-type” organizations based on the interest of a close group of rich philanthropists; neither the context of the big city is favorable for the deeply-rooted “saksaul-type” strategy, because the “soil” is thick and inhomogeneous with wet and dry areas, unexpected barriers, and many other seeking roots webbing around. The “climate” in big cities also changes much faster and therefore is not supportive to long-term gradual growth in depth and with.

The way out is either to find fertile lens of soil limited to a certain elitist group of interests or to take some other shape. The latter decision is normally the easiest and most CFs follow this way, which usually means becoming an issue-based fundraising NGO, connecting specific issues and potential philanthropic interests.

It also requires much stronger leadership skills to be able to develop and communicate civil society values for a big city that is comparable to the whole country. In attempt of doing this the big city CFs also get into competition with national and even international organizations that are engaged in this professionally. **In this sense Boris Strechansky’s the Center for Philanthropy offering services to donors is a much more a city-level CF than the Bratislava CF**, and this consideration can be applied to both the Via Foundation in Prague and CAF Russia in Moscow.

What I saw while meeting with Daniela Danihelova, the Executive Director of the Bratislava CF (BCF), was a small NGO running a few small projects, among which the most notable ones were “Give a Book” and the “Duck Race”. None of the projects are actually fundraising and primarily they aim at attracting citizens’ attention to giving and to NGOs, which in its turn ensures quite stable 2% in-flow in the amount of about EUR 45K a year. This money allows the BCF to support small community projects and generate creative ideas like an “Interactive Map of Bratislava”.

My key question to Daniela was what was the BCF’s ultimate ambition in the development of their organization and what role the CF may play in the city? The question also related to the relationships with the city authorities. The answer was that the CF sees itself as a small organization that keeps attracting citizen’s attention to the city’s issues like cultural heritage. In regard to communication with local government I also heard the phrase that the civil society is “alien” to them.

This is not for me to judge whether this view is right or wrong, because it’s up to each organization to choose its own path, but I will try to elaborate on what I think the role of a CF could be in a big city.

First of all, the crucial point is that CFs represent philanthropy and civil society infrastructure, meaning that it supports the values of the civil society through supporting its institutions. The specific and amazing example of this, which I saw in Bratislava was the small nonprofit organization providing palliative care to mentally retarded adults have slight mental deviations and who do not need to stay in specialized psychiatric clinics. Its budget does not exceed EUR 3000 a month and it does a great job on creating family atmosphere of love and care for these people, which does much more for their social inclusion than the specialized medical treatment.

When I asked the leader of the organization whether they were getting any governmental support she answered that there is a certain interest but getting connected to the government would mean to them following strict standards, among which would be, for example, wearing white doctor’s gowns. They considered this inadmissible for their care model, as this will ruin the sense of home.

This is precisely the image of the value of independent social organization, which is not attempting to protest against the existing “regime”, but it shows an alternative approach to addressing the social issue. **Promoting such organizations is exactly the role of a CF.**

Generalizing this, it should promote the importance of private initiative in the social sphere (nonprofits are actually private in the first place), which comes where the government either fails or just have no

clue how to address within its standardized and often dehumanized service roster. This is the market for the civil society and ***CFs will start making sense if they head and lead the fight for the market of alternative social services***. Then they will stop being “alien” to the government, will gain significance within the local authorities and opinion leaders, and will become the opinion leaders themselves.

It is of crucial importance that the CF – as an expert on the alternative services – becomes a part of the major public councils at the key welfare institutions or decision-makers providing its “minority report” on the acute issues of the city. This can make the positive project that may consolidate the community around the CF.

Five Countries – Different Worlds

The last study visit obliges me to make a certain comparison of the situations in the countries that I was privileged to visit and to get acquainted with – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. It’s really been a great pleasure to visit these countries as our nations have a lot in common, our languages (perhaps only except Romania) sound alike, we face similar issues, and our mentality while maybe limiting in terms of pragmatism and strive for prosperity allows us to live at and love every moment of love. We may complain about ourselves but we have rich cultures and a lot to be proud of.

At the same time it will be wrong to say that people living in CEE countries represent some kind of unified nation. Even calling ourselves “Europeans” is wrong, and this is what I could get convinced of while travelling in those five countries.

After extensive travels and meetings with people in those countries I worked out for myself a rather non-standard criterion for measuring the fertility of the ground for building CF movements in the countries – it’s the **intensity of complaints about the context**. The less people complain the more potential there is for a successful CF project.

Perhaps it would be worth making a certain sociological research on those correlations in the future, but intuitively it was quite obvious for me, and here I would like to identify two countries – **Poland and Romania**, where I saw the least level of complaints and the most promising CF movements.

Poland

I’ve always known Poland as a very entrepreneurial country with active (some would say ‘aggressive’ – but in a good sense) people. Every chance is used and every penny utilized and nowhere else you would meet such a commitment towards endowment and eternity that is most certainly related to the strong Catholic tradition and the mindset. I recall my first (related to CFs) visit to Poland in 2002 when I happened to meet Ken Strmiska, the CEO of the Greater Green Bay CF. He said that he was absolutely impressed by Gothic Cathedrals, which were built sometimes for centuries, as those were the real image and sense of endowment – people starting doing something with no even slightest hope to see the result in their lifetime. I also remember how the Ford Motor Company decided to launch a Polish-type of car-credit program in Russia – when you start putting money in advance and get a car in 2-3 years. This program failed as Russians just didn’t understand it – “we want it here and now, and then we’ll see”. But it was normal for Poles who were ready to wait.

Little by little, penny to penny, one step at a time, patiently but consistently Polish CFs were growing and building assets, and now constituting probably the strongest and broadest CF network in CEE. Through using the *suksaul* strategy of growing deep roots and tapping on every resource possible the network truly became a major civil society foundation for the country.

Romania

Romania was a special revelation for me as I had quite underestimated this country before. I have a feeling that since this country hadn’t been under strong influence of the Soviet Union and had its “own”

tyrant it had fewer grounds for blaming “someone who forced us” – rather “it was us who did this to ourselves”. I found strong optimism and commitment and a very business-like attitude to the organizational development in community philanthropy: “we try this, if it doesn’t work we shall try something else”, “let’s try what others already made”. Some think Romanian CFs look similar and all do the same instruments, but if you look at businesses most of them look similar as they follow the same rules and principles. In one book on creativity I read an interesting point of view that “copying is actually one of the most important components of creativity”.

The key is in constant trying, experimenting, expanding current possibilities, and searching for new ones. The level of sophistication of a CF can be measured not by some state-of-the-art complex community impact programs, but the dynamic of expansion. In the end CFs become state-of-the-art and ensure profound community impact through using multiple simple instruments and engaging a wide range of partners – the *deeply rooted saksaul* strategy; and the Romanian CFs are instrumental following this strategy.

Bulgaria

I wasn’t present at the study visit in Bulgaria, but I know the CF movement there and I made a consultancy project on the CF strategy.

Bulgaria is probably the unluckiest country among the ones that accessed the EU. Partly because its economy was closely integrated with the Soviet Union and historically with Russia – it was getting industry in return to agricultural production. Now as the EU demanded to close the Kozlodui Nuclear power plant, and the local agriculture became uncompetitive given its underdevelopment in comparison with major EU countries, Bulgarian national economy can be called as nearly inexistent and dependent on the sales of the seashore land, which is limited and at the same time it is still less competitive price- and service-wise to countries like Spain or Cyprus.

Obviously the economic decline makes people less optimistic, and this is also added by the national type of temper that developed in centuries of external oppression and colonization resulting in less initiative and more self-reflection. People prefer to seek some simpler comfort than adventure or exploration.

Given the entrepreneurial nature of community foundations, Bulgaria is not the most favorable environment for community foundations. However, they do exist and I must say that the Bulgarian CF network is live, vibrant and provides a good variety of CF models, most of which though are very experimental and look like “interest clubs” organized for spending good time. This is good for a start but provides little chances for building sustainable institutions.

The biggest problem of Bulgaria at this moment is the absence of what can be called the “national idea” or the vision of its way of development as a nation within the EU which could give the civil society a chance to articulate the values and hence offer its place in the development context.

Czech Republic

For me the distinguishing feature of the CF movement in Czech Republic was the environment and probably it would be more fair to say – the starting conditions for the national philanthropy infrastructure, because it is the only country where in the 90s the government took the decision to channel the funds gained from privatization to endowments of philanthropic institutions. This truly progressive move endowed philanthropy in the country making it a strong sustainable phenomenon. The other side of it – as of a one-off act and the only case in the post-Communist countries – is the establishment of a group of “chosen” institutions whose experience is simply unrepeatable. Therefore the look of a few beautiful “oak trees” among the bushes or *saksauls* creates a certain dualistic feeling – on the other hand there is a real and strong infrastructure for the national civil society, on the other – the feeling “I will never be like them”, which might scare off new initiatives from starting up. This is

probably one of the reasons why the CF movement has not become widespread and hasn't taken roots throughout the country.

Slovakia

Now back to Slovakia.

"Still there and doing the same thing" – this phrase said by Tamas Scsaurszki, who meant this as a positive reflection on the visits to Slovakian CFs who survive despite all odds, for me has a rather bitter taste, because it unexpectedly precisely captured the current status of the CF movement in Slovakia, where neither financial dynamics nor the growth of foundations in number has shown any progress for the last decade. The "youngest" CF was established in 2005 and CF budgets stayed on the same level or rather decreased.

I could sense a certain exhaustion and the lack of vision within the field leadership in the country and I think this needs to be addressed. There is a feeling as if the oldest CF movement really grew old, but I'm far from thinking that it's due to the leaders who run it for the last 2 decades – my sense is that the movement is still perceived by communities as a part of the "European" civil society and therefore rather external and "alien" than native and local.

It is hard for me to judge about the key reasons of why it is happening, but I would try to make some round up based on what I heard on the conference in Bratislava.

There are objective developments that are happening in the international CF field and the issues related to the movement in the country. I will say shortly about what I think is happening locally and with elaborate on more details on what is going on internationally.

I think that in Slovakia there has been no dedicated leadership to the CF development and direct investments since the closure of the Ecopolis Foundation's program for about a decade. With all respect to national CF networks and federations I can say that (it is based on the experience in Russia too) they are not capable to develop and articulate the values and roles of the philanthropy infrastructure for the whole nation, simply because it is not their job and they need to care about their own communities, while the messages suitable for communities will not necessarily have the meaning for the country. Therefore there will always be a need for a countrywide leadership organization that will not only be able to develop the national message, but also influence the way the field is developing through financial mechanisms. National associations in their turn could ensure networking and practice exchange.

My further critique will be related to the V4 grant program setup. My view is that it is too technical and it neither provides the right developmental message, nor it can play the role of an international leader influencing the movements in four countries, and nor it can raise local/national funding to top up the grant program, because local funders would rather their money stay in their countries. I see that the problem here lies in the fact that the four countries have so many differences that an international program cannot develop the right goals and values that would be universal for each of them. At the same time as concerned practice exchange then national CF networks would be a better place to go simply because they practice it.

Therefore in my view and this would be my proposal for the future of the C.S.Mott's organization development program would be: **support INTERNATIONAL networking and NATIONAL CF development grantmaking**. The national CF support organizations in this case should have the authority to make choices of supporting individual CFs, startups and/or national networks depending on the context and situation.

International Movement: Where It Goes Wrong

The case of a donor

I think it would be helpful tell the case of my organization – the Timchenko Foundation, one of the largest private donors in Russia – to show that I practice what I preach.

First, the family of the founder represents the highest level of Russian elite with all its ambiguity and contradictions, and my belief is that the fact that they decided to start an open public organization is an act of courage, which sends a clear message to other people of wealth in terms of how they should be tackling their charity and implementing social responsibility. Now the foundation is one of a few that seeks to find solutions to social issues on systemic level – from raising civic initiatives to influencing the state social policy.

Second, since the foundation prefers to work with local communities and support projects in small towns and villages, we need regional partners. What are the criteria for choosing them?

I would name the key ones that help us take the first intuitive decision before going into details:

- 1) Entrepreneurial skills: the ability to offer and quickly generate ideas, and the proof of local support;
- 2) The ability to implement projects – meeting deadlines, making reporting , organizing collective decision-making processes, working with PR and media;
- 3) **“The warm nose”**. This is a special criterion which is hard to explain in scientific terms and this does not relate to the forms of organizations – but rather to their leadership style: they should WANT AND LIKE to be doing what we want them to do.

In this sense we don’t really care what partner we cooperate with – for example, we can hire a commercial operator on the agency contract, but then we don’t get “the warm nose”. Or we can hire a very “warm” NGO, but usually it has a very narrow-focused mission and the mindset fails the management part and eventually it fails the management part.

The hardest is the “entrepreneurial” requirement – it means that as the program manager I don’t want to hear “tell us what to do, and we shall do it”. I usually say: “You have the freedom to act, but in the end we want the best projects and the raised recognition level of the social issue that we care about. Tell us what you think we should be doing and how we should be structuring our programs in your region. Furthermore, we look not only for efficiency but also for an exit strategy, so we expect you find extra local funding for the topic that we support.”

In the end I come to that CFs are the BEST POSSIBLE PARTNERS for our purposes. But again for me the important thing is that they practice the CF style of operation, and I don’t care how they are titled, although peer recommendations that they can really do the job are usually very helpful. In the end the presence of a CF or other CF-type capable organization serves as a key to our decision what region we would like to enter and support. I must also say though that we had a couple of failures while working with new organizations that spent the money but did nothing for the topic promotion, and I’m currently in the process of making an audit and probably taking to court of one of such organizations. Nevertheless, during last year we channeled altogether nearly \$3 mil through various forms of regional partners, among which there were mostly those known as CFs.

Another important consideration is that private donors want to help and not to develop the civil society or support some new concepts – the answer they need is always to WHO WE HELPED, AND DID WE DO IT IN THE MOST EFFICIENT WAY?

This is what the CFs should be able to answer and to know how to offer the best solution.

CFs, Leadership and Endowments

The CF concept was brought to the newly emerged democracies in search of mechanisms to draw local resources to the young civil society movements. We were eager to hear the stories of how philanthropy can be looked at pragmatically and turned into a set of understandable instruments.

The fact that communities in CEE countries had very little actual financial resources the discourse changed from the “service” to the “leadership” paradigm. Indeed CFs often take the role of a community leader, but it eventually may result and results in that perception of CFs started substituting the whole civil society.

Now keep on hearing questions addressed to CFs: **how you contribute to the social change and social justice?** As if a small organization can really do something in this area and especially as if they can do any measurements to just try to answer these questions?

Of course, CFs do need to understand the values of the civil society and help it get shaped in the form of professional institutions, but the social change cannot be the KPI (Key performance indicator) for CFs, rather it should be the number and sophistication of civil society initiatives and the level of their local support.

I think that the “leadership” message also supports the obsession with endowments in CEE, and the way the endowment issue is put forward – “what the endowment should be in order to be sustainable?” It’s an absolutely wrong way of putting this question, because in fact it means “how much money I need in order to do what I want and to stop working hard for this miserable salary?”

I think each of us heard stories when you ask a decent US CF something like “you have \$200mil in endowment, why don’t you do more work in this or that community issue?” And the answer would be: “I have no much authority over the endowment, because it is spent in according with donors’ decisions and all expenditures are prescribed in advance.”

It is the hardest and longest task to build the unrestricted part of endowment allowing freedom of action and the ability to undertake the “community leadership” role – the real leadership and not alienated and externally funded.

Hence the endowment is not a prescription for gaining “good life” but it’s a mere one of the possible donor-engagement tools, which can be used by a CF in given context and situation.

However, CFs must have the knowledge on how establish endowments in the country because sooner or later they can get a request of “how to make a trace in community forever”. Even with this request the endowment is just an option because the donor might consider, say, building a church, (and who are we to prevent him/her from doing it?) but the CF should be able to explain the need of making an openly accessible funding source instead of leaving a material object, and moreover to make a proof that the money in endowment will be well managed and won’t be lost in inflation or in an inevitable financial crisis.

When I raised a question of a field-of-interest endowment for the issues of the elderly with our founders, they laughed at me saying that “look at the ruble exchange rate that went nearly 50% up for the last few months, so let’s close the question”. But anyway I know that I will come back with this a year later, because I believe that **it’s not the amount that matter but the guaranteed regular funding for the topic that should inspire others to contribute.**

Back to the Money

CFs should understand and share the values of the civil society and do everything to help it strengthen, but they do not substitute it – they represent the resource infrastructure for it, the part of the infrastructure that ensures financial and material resources. Therefore CFs need be able to speak about

money not hiding in the jungle of conceptual issues, because most donors don't need and don't understand them.

Donors want to help and they need efficient partners with the "warm nose" who will not just distribute the money but will provide the feedback that will grant them with feeling of the sense and meaning in life. That's why it is so important to be able to articulate the values directly connected with the community and not with abstract ideals.

As I said previously, as a donor I would prefer to deal rather with those who can manage funds rather than those who promote concepts. Being "back to the money" means in the first place thinking about others and not about yourselves and becoming service-oriented instead showing your arrogance and pride. I understand why people don't like speaking about the money – because you have to step over your pride; but I don't understand why it is increasingly considered to be a "bad style" talking about it within the CF network – a network of professional service providers!

I would also like to respond to the message of "volunteering being better and more effective than paid services". Volunteering is good in mobilizing people for a one-off action to, say, clean the garbage from the yard, but in order the garbage to be cleaned regularly there is a need in professional services. The same about the civil society – there is a need to sustain professional civil society acting regularly and every day, and not just coming for a one-off gathering

Looking Further

In my view the CF field in CEE is a bit in stagnation, and there is a need in the infusion of new leadership and new thinking.

As for the new thinking, I would say that it's rather getting back to the "old thinking" or to the basics, as we knew them at the CF concept kickoff in Europe, but through the lens of the existing experience and business models.

As well it is related to the "new leadership" – we need to look back at the way the national networks started in the late 1990s and beginning of 2000s, when the field development had a strategy and was backed with financial resources. I think that it is too early to say that "the field is more or less completed; now we can do something else, or support it with occasional networking".

One of the problem is that the CFs who reached a certain level of maturity in fact enter competition with supporting organizations themselves, because they can offered similar services on grantmaking and philanthropic consultancy at a lower price, and it is not so much the CFs, but the supporting organizations that need to change their role in community philanthropy promotion and be more creative.

My suggestion would be to further work on attracting money to the field from national governments, EU, and the international CF community. It requires different types of skills, but it needs to be done. For example, it is a shame that the EU and UN agencies don't recognize CFs as a crucial civil society infrastructure, and they keep on introducing various artificial concepts like the LEADER and others, which do not assume any exit strategy. The attempt done by the Global Fund hasn't reached much result, but at least there has been interest from the Aga Khan Foundation in the areas of their presence.

I still believe that there is a chance to mobilize resources for the CF development in Europe with the US community foundation network, especially in the context of growing tension around Ukraine and Russia. I don't know who can do this but this person needs to be able to communicate both the European civil society values and understand the core – financial – concept of community foundations.

I don't believe in the need for "Europeanization" of the concept and identifying some universal "European" CF model – it simply doesn't exist, as there is no "European" nation; but I believe in universal business principles that help CFs find identity in both Europe and Africa, and in pragmatic interests of certain international and European developmental organizations, where the CF concept can fit in as an exit strategy.

Think about others and not yourself.

Hope it's not the End

Here I come to the end of my reflections. I'm extremely grateful to Vera Dakova and all friends for this extended experience of being able to travel to these beautiful countries, to gain, to share, to have a chance for a 'say', and to be heard.

We have long road ahead, the life is not becoming easier as the Wall is being built again, but I'm sure that the work that we've done and the organizations that appeared and became stronger owing to this exchange ensure that the Wall has no foundation, and

ANOTHER CF MEANS LESS ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL.

Vadim Samorodov

Moscow

November 2014