

## Reflections

So I'm looking at your July 9 invitation, and thinking about what I could possibly contribute. First off, my congratulations for persevering in the pursuit of a useful and honorable community philanthropy in your part of the world. I wish I could be there for the celebration itself, but instead I'll try to make an attempt with your four questions, in the hope that the conference audience will find some use for it.

#1 When did you first encounter the idea of community foundations in Central/Eastern Europe? What did you think at that moment?

I thought it a brave and worthwhile effort, and wanted to help with it. As you know my first encounter was in relation to a C.S. Mott/Soros Bulgaria effort to help plant the seeds for American-style community foundations in Bulgaria. I had many questions, however, whether American-style community foundations could be a successful "export product" that could take root in Bulgaria, which shares little in cultural history with the U.S. Perhaps it would be like Bulgarian wines, which are delicious in Bulgaria but don't travel well, not even as far as Britain.

#2 In your experience, what are the issues around community foundation development in CEE that we could be proud of? What are those mistakes that we should learn from?

Successes: (a) Moving into the civic space that was vacated when the central totalitarian governments of the former soviet union suddenly withdrew. (b) Creating and advancing the discussions of the feasibility of a civic or independent sector. (c) Exploring the abstract concept of "philanthropy" and what it could mean in the many distinct cultures of CEE. (d) Creating from nothing the structures of community philanthropy throughout the region. (e) Publicizing in an ongoing way the possibilities of community philanthropy and community foundations or even civic clubs (as they were first known in Bulgaria). (f) Supporting (through grants and "gifts of legitimacy") the variety of possibilities that a vital nonprofit sector should promote.

Mistakes? I don't know. Challenges? (a) Overcoming local resistance to a vital philanthropy, making it more acceptable, more legitimate, more available, more accessible to real people, not just institutional givers. (b) Developing financial resources for making progress, but also human resources, information resources, technical resources. (c) Developing the leadership and management skills needed to make progress with this movement.

3) What was the funniest/weirdest experience you had while working with CEE community foundations?

Once, in the exuberance and enthusiasm I felt when attending a board meeting of a local foundation, in order to demonstrate American style fundraising, I offered to contribute some of my own money in support of a particular project, and "challenged" others in the room to create an equal-size pot. For me, it was just a small amount, a modest portion of what I carried in my wallet, but unfortunately I grossly overestimated the financial capabilities of others there, and my challenge was unmet. This created huge embarrassment, especially in me. Moral: Don't do stupid stuff.

#4) In your view, what are the major global issues/trends/phenomena that CEE community foundations should pay particular attention in the next decade? Why?

Social problems are becoming more difficult to challenge, it seems, at least in my part of the world. I used to think philanthropy could help; I'm a bit more skeptical now. But one must remain optimistic.

Well, again, I thank you for the invitation, and I congratulate you and your CEE/philanthropy colleagues on your successes so far.

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