



**C E N T R U M
K O M U N I T N É H O
O R G A N I Z O V A N I A**



GR pre vzdelávanie a kultúru

Program celoživotného vzdelávania

**Combined European Bureau for Social Development
TLCD: Training and Learning for Community Development:
EAC/61/2006 Key Activity 4: Dissemination and Exploitation of Results**

**Relay visit – Banska Bystrica
April 21st – 23rd 2008**

Theme: Active citizenship - Community organizing and other approaches

Participants:

Hans-Georg Rennert – Kommunales Forum Wedding – Germany
Sarah Beal – CESIE - Italy
Sue Webb – Community Development Foundation – Great Britain
Chuck Hirt – Center for Community Organizing - host from Slovakia

Program:

Monday 21 April

Relay visit report

Report from the relay visit in England held March 12 through 14th. Sue reported on the visit that had taken place the previous month.

Report presentation delivered at the Relay meeting in Slovakia

Training & Learning for Community Development Relay Meeting UK

Sue Webb
Community Development Foundation UK
European and International Unit

Overview

Why are we meeting?

- Two day meeting
- Get to know one another
- Share experiences
- Contribute to ongoing learning



Overview

What do we need to talk about?

- Programme
- Questions????
- Logistics



CEBSD's

- Combined European Bureau for Social Development
- Project promoter
 - Three areas of work
- Projects
- Networking
- Policy

CEBSDs

- CEBSD - exchange good practice and to distil policy lessons from practice.
 - Three main areas of exchange
- Development of Civil Society
- Including the Excluded
- Training and learning for Community Development

CEBSD's Project

- Training & Learning for CD
- **1. Training & Learning Partnership**
- **2. Multipliers**
- **3. Sharing & Learning**

Community Development Foundation CEBSD's Member

- Non-departmental public body
- Approx 70% funded by Department for Communities and Local Government
- Delivery of projects and programmes
- Context – evolved out of welfare state
- Various policy streams – strengthening communities, engagement – cohesion
- European work – not funded by UK Gov

What is Community Development?

Community development is the “invisible” profession because CD work is about enabling and empowering others

Building equity, inclusiveness, participation and cohesion amongst people and groups and organisations

Community Development Policy context

- CD is about enabling the empowerment of others
- Role of government is changing – the need for greater empowerment
- Change has to take place from the bottom up – society relies on CD to do this, but CD is not well known
- If there was no CD there may be problems of participation, inclusion and poor social capital

European Policy & CD

- CEBSD's works to influence policy with the aim of ensuring policy is developed that is favourable to CD
- Social Platform
- The members of the Social Platform represent thousands of organisations, associations and other voluntary groups at local, regional, national and European level representing the interests of a wide range of civil society.
- <http://www.socialplatform.org/PolicyAction.asp>

Discussion

- Press Release

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Introduction – context in Slovakia

This session began with Chuck providing some context for the introduction of community organizing in Slovakia. This was a virtually brand new concept when introduced in 1996. There was not even language for some terms used and even when there were actual words,

they sometimes had to be modified and clarified as they represented a different context. The profession of social work and community development remains very limited through the present. The vast majority of the training and work available is focused on service, not community process or change.

Over the next few years however, there was a growing understanding and appreciation of community work. A country-wide network of NGOs had been operating and had divided itself into thematic groups. By 1998, they decided to add one more thematic group around the issue of community. This was the only new thematic group to be added and reflected an emerging new set of community-based activities going on in the country.

When the work began, the country was still under the grip of the Authoritarian Prime Minister, Vladimir Mecar. A great deal of reforms, both democratic as well as economic were undertaken following this important election. Devolution of power to local levels took place along with other important reforms such as Freedom of Information and new laws regarding NGOs. What has taken place since then has been a strengthening of the economic reforms as the country clearly is pleased with the results of capitalism. But a number of the democratic oriented changes are less valued and a number of these laws are currently being re-considered with less democratic provisions are being proposed.

On the local level, considerable changes took place. Especially in urban areas, this has been a time of unprecedented growth and opportunity for development. It also has been a chance for a few to get wealthy as city assets continue to be sold and investors are working deals with government officials. There is generally little interest for citizens to be involved. Even the basic issue of information is usually not provided. There are a few hopeful signs in this area but they are a distinct minority at the moment.

On the citizens' side of this, participation is also quite a new thing. Under Socialism, participation was not tolerated so residents are in need of re-learning this behavior. Citizens don't even know each other as they continue behavior from the previous era when one in six people were informants and people didn't risk talking about important items with those they did not trust. There is a very low opinion of politicians. They are generally seen as there for their own self-interest. They remain apathetic and quite hopeless about change. This is also reflected in voter turnout where approximately 35 per cent participate in local elections (versus sixty in national elections). In large housing areas, voter participation is often even ten per cent lower still. Citizens also lack organizations and structures which allow them to participate in any meaningful manner. They are also affected by what one author termed "post-Communist legacy". In a book entitled: The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe, the author, Marc Morje Howard describes many of the challenges facing citizens across all this part of Europe. His research indicates that there is a common behavior of citizens in all post-Communist countries which negatively affects their ability to influence activities. Despite this issue, he is quick to hasten that that does not mean that they do not get engaged or have interest. Quite the contrary exists. However, there are a number of limiting factors for them.

An additional factor in the region has been the significant influence of the United States of America. Significant US dollars were invested in the region following the fall of Communism. There were also a number of American organizations, structures and approaches introduced into the region. A number of NGO are now having to adjust to European structures and funding as the US support has generally left the region.

The work in communities has another outstanding feature in that neighborhoods are still generally heterogeneous in population. Unlike cities in most of Western European and the US, the makeup of population is much more mixed which brings a considerable resource to work that is undertaken. The economic segregation of people which usually results from Capitalism has not taken effect as yet. Doctors, lawyers, architects and the Vice Mayor may live along with those who pick up trash and manual labor. This is definitely one of the positive legacies of Communism as there is a rich base of skills and talents in neighborhoods.

An article written by Jana Mikova (attached) had been distributed prior to the session for everyone to read. Jana is someone from Banska Bystrica who had worked at the British Council until it closed in 2006. She became increasingly active in public life, particularly in a fight in the spring of 2006 to preserve a park area of the city. Later that year she decided to move to Scotland and eventually enrolled at a university there. The paper was written for one of her classes but in this paper, she describes some of her experience with activism in Slovakia. It provides an interesting insight into her introductory experience compared with some of her new experience in Scotland. It also provides an interesting introduction to the work of the Center for Community Organizing.

The work of the Center for Community Organizing

Chuck briefly introduced the work of the Center for Community Organizing. The work was begun in 1996 with funding from the U.S. government. The project was interested in establishing a community organizing project in Slovakia. It was managed by the National Democratic Institute. Funding was provided for three years to help introduce this work. Slovaks were hired and trained to be community organizers during this period. The first two groups of organizers were taken to the U.S. for additional training and to have a chance to them to see this work first hand.

Following training, organizers began doing interviews with citizens living in large housing areas using a door knocking approach. There was considerable resistance to this type of work but eventually they all began to realize that people were quite open and interested to talk with someone who actually wanted to listen to them. Initial campaigns were eventually launched and nearly all were successful. Citizens began to realize that they could be active in public life and that democracy began to mean much more to them. The approach focused primarily on taking action followed by reflection. Eventually more formal training was introduced for activists as well.

Chuck gave several examples of campaigns that were taken on including citizens fighting to increase the number of police patrolling the Sasova neighborhood in Banska Bystrica. Citizens eventually met with the Chief of Police and negotiated an increase. Citizens from the Zapad neighborhood in Zvolen initiated a campaign to get a new sidewalk around the center of their neighborhood. They prepared a February meeting with the Mayor and he promised to have it ready the following September for the start of the school year. He not only kept his promise but spent six times more than citizens requested with a significantly improved center area. CKO is best known for a two and a half year campaign when residents from the Radvan neighborhood in Banska Bystrica fought plans to have a gas station built in the pedestrian center of their neighborhood.

Examples of active citizenship in other countries connected with how training and learning took place

brief description by Hans – Georg Rennert, Kommunales Forum Wedding e.V.

1. Planning for Real in the Sprengelkiez – neighbourhood 1994 (!)

Kommunales Forum Wedding e.V. (KFW)

The Wedding Community Forum an organisation (net-)working mainly in Berlin – Wedding, now part of the central district Berlin – Mitte. Since its foundation in 1988 it has been initiating and promoting the co-operation of actors of the public, private and third sector, mobilising communities, community (economic) development and local employment initiatives under the heading "Working for the quality of life in the neighbourhood". Since 1997 the focus has been on the development of area-targeted, integrated co-operation in projects often within the framework of the Wedding Local Partnership (until 2001). KFW has been acting as a "promoter" of co-operation", as "nursery" for new ideas, but also as the formal body / entity for projects. The exchange of experiences and co-operation with partners outside the area has often been a stimulation and enrichment for the work at local level.

- KFW is a mix between 'professional (service delivery) organisation' and self – help group
- Part of a movement promoting and practicing 'economic self – help and local development' and social economy (European Network for Economic Self – Help and Local Development - EuroNet)
- The emphasis of its work was (in 1993 / 1994) on public debates on local development (Kommunale Foren at district level and Kiezgespräche in the neighbourhood) and on
- Doing – making contacts and get rooted in the Sprengelkiez
- NOT on (formal) training

But we (the core group of staff / persons who wanted to do the work as paid work) were willing to listen to others – learning from their experience and adapt 'models' and 'tools' to our own circumstances (EuroNet)

Heard about Planning for Real and got in contact with Tony Gibson via EuroNet

Approached him to prepare the work with Planning for Real (coaching and mentoring by him) Action and training / reflection!

(more info on **Planning for Real**: www.nic.co.uk/planningforreal (English) and www.planning-for-real.de (German))

PFR in the Sprengelkiez

(without 'legitimation' / 'voluntary – there was no political will or funding programme to 'support' these activities by KFW)

KFW's intentions:

- from isolated contacts with some key persons to direct contacts with residents (esp. those who usually don't take part in formal meetings)
- from narrow view onto some institutions towards a broad perspective onto the whole neighbourhood
- direct communication with residents at places where everyday life takes place

action and training / reflection

- for the group of people who wanted ‘to do it’: KFW staff – a group of students of town planning interested in ‘participation’ – some neighbours – this mixed group soon become the “AKTIV IM KIEZ” initiative – we met once a week – at peak times around 20 people – to plan and act
- coaching and support by Tony Gibson: he took part in the kick – off meeting and explained PFR (different kind of communication – prepare action – sort out responsibilities – “Experts on tap, not on top!”)
- still in contact / exchange with Tony on developments in the SprengelKiez today

2. „Aktivierende Befragung“ im Soldiner Kiez (und im SprengelKiez) 1999

„aktivierende Befragung“ – somewhat like „mobilising survey“ – further information
„Handbuch Aktivierende Befragung“ published by: Stiftung Mitarbeit, Bonn 2003;
www.mitarbeit.de

background:

- KFW did facilitate the „Lokale Partnerschaft Wedding“ (Wedding Local Partnership“) at that time (1996 – 2000)
- Within the partnership we had working groups on order to develop ‘area – targeted’ (sorry for the term) approaches for some disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the district: the Soldiner Kiez and the Sprengelkiez
- A member of the Soldiner Kiez working group was the neighbourhood centre Prinzenallee PA 58
- PA 58’s intention was to sharpen the profile of the neighbourhood centre for the people living around it – to find out what they wish or expect to happen in the PA 58 and to mobilize them to act (more) for themselves with the support of PA 58
- PA 58 intended to use the technique of the “Aktivierende Befragung” with a mixed team: some staff and members of the PA 58 association + local residents
- In order to be able to do this they needed a training on “Aktivierende Befragungen”
- KFW did find a source of funding to bring in an experienced trainer and facilitator (Maria Lüttringhaus from ESSEN) for a 2 days – training in Berlin

Training and learning

- 2 days training
- shortly before the action took place – with practical exercises
- mixed group of ‘professionals’ (staff from neighbourhood centre) and non-professionals (residents)
- “aktivierende Befragung” shortly after the training within a couple of weeks by tandems on the streets and ‘knocking on doors’ also
- presentation of results at a public meeting in the neighbourhood centre soon after finishing survey
- Was there a reflection of the experiences with those who took part in it? I don’t remember!
- What was the role of the residents after the survey? I don’t remember? (the Quartiersmanagement - “Neighbourhood management – took over probably ...

More info also: Verband für sozial – kulturelle Arbeit Rundbrief 2/99 – to be downloaded from www.vska.de

(KfW used the „aktivierende Befragung“ including the model of the Sprengelkiez that had been built during Planning for Real“ for a survey on “How is life in the Sprengelkiez?” in the view of residents and also to introduce the then new role / task of Quartiersmanagement in the area)

information on quartiersmangement: www.sozialestadt.de (also in English)

Experience in Italy: Contact sarah.beal@cesie.it for report

Tuesday 22 April

Discussion with organizers

Kajo Zboril and Anna Karialieva joined the group for a discussion about their experience of being trained in community organizing. They described how they began their work and how the ideas that were introduced were considerably different than they had ever considered before. One of the most vivid examples was the task to knock on doors to conduct interviews. They all believed that this was not possible in Slovakia. They found to their considerable surprise that people actually were happy to have someone listen to them. At times they had the opposite problem of limiting the time they were in someone's place. Starting to raise funds in the community was similar as they learned that people were willing and interested to give money for something which was of benefit to their neighborhood. They had assumed that this was not possible.

Both Kajo and Anna were convinced that there has been a significant impact of their work in Slovakia. CKO had pioneered this work. It was now a more visible form of activity and they were convinced that CKO had helped to show that this was possible.

They described how they had learned things like how to relate to the group. One of the most difficult aspects of their work has been to not take on the leadership in groups. There have been constant struggles with how to encourage, train and motivate others to take on leadership roles. There has been considerable resistance for citizens to take on leadership as well as membership in citizen initiatives. Organizers have struggled with their instincts to fill in this role for groups but as a result build dependence on themselves and thus reduce the group's capacity to be effective. There seem to be specific difficulties in doing this work in post-Communist countries regarding issues of membership and leadership.

Another significant problem commonly faced was to work with the group following their first victory. The method of selecting the next issue to work has been part of the problem. Also there have been a number of people for whom solving the original problem was what was important to them. They then moved away from the group.

Most of the issues that have emerged have been related with physical space and plans for development. Very few issues to date have included social issues like drugs or homeless.

There are issues that have been addressed related to safety however. Thus far these issues have not lead to longer term relations with groups like the police.

Another aspect of the work was related to elections. There was a realization that voter turnout was low, especially in local elections. Local politicians generally took their constituency for granted. The good news was that the voting system did provide for election by districts and that votes of city council members was recorded and available to the public. CKO worked with citizens to prepare campaigns prior to the election where four major things occurred. The first was to conduct candidate forums, primarily for Mayoral candidates. The second was to prepare a "citizens agenda" based on issues that critical to the needs of residents living in Banska Bystrica. The third was to tabulate the votes of city council members from the previous four years on votes taken that were of particular relevance to citizens. These were then widely distributed around the city. Finally, a get-out-the-vote effort was also included to encourage citizens to actively participate. Considerable success was found with this campaign.

Citizens are learning that there are two options available for them when solving problems like the lack of playgrounds in their neighborhood. On one hand, they can raise some money and donate time to actually construct a new playground. On the other, they can also hold elected officials to ensure that city resources are spent on things like this when citizens really wish for this to occur.

A different model of organizing has developed in Slovakia than exists in England or Germany where the Industrial Areas Foundation have been active. In these western European examples, they generally work in larger areas where more than 100,000 people may live and build a "platform" where 30 to 40 different organizations are the core membership. The experience in Slovakia has been that these type of organizations do not exist or when they do like churches, they do not tend to get involved in community work as yet. The Slovak model has been based primarily on individual members. Even the issue of membership has been a problem however as a "post-Communist legacy" exists where people are very hesitant to become members. They are often willing and interested to get involved and be a part but the idea of being a "member" is something that they strongly resist.

The hardest part of the work was changing attitudes and thinking in this part of the world. Both Anna and Kajo believe though that considerable progress has been made over the previous ten plus years.

Discussion with activists turned local politicians

Vlado Pirocek and Ludmilla Priehodova joined the group later in the morning. Vlado introduced himself as a lawyer with a background in Environment and Public Interest. He had been living in Bratislava with his wife and had helped prepare several items related to important legislation on things such as Freedom of Information (FOI). After working with nearly 40 to 50 cases of citizen groups filing complaints about implementation of FOI and having lost many of these, he decided to move back to his home town of Banska Bystrica and enter local politics to attempt to bring about change from the inside. He helped to form an independent group which called itself, Banska Bystrica Alternative (BBA). The group was quite successful in their first campaign when 6 of their 11 candidates won.

However they find themselves in a distinct minority out of 31 members. The current ruling coalition does not like BBA as they often find themselves criticizing activities being carried out. The majority of issues that they are involved with are related to land planning and sale of city property. It is the experience of BBA that many of these deals are corrupt and certainly done without almost no consultation with citizens.

BBA has initiated several new things through their efforts. They have initiated a weekly session where citizens could visit them to discuss concerns they may have about the activities of city hall. They have initiated a law that provides more space for citizens who might have an interest to attend and speak on their behalf at the monthly city council meetings. They have also gotten legislation approved providing more public information on the city's web site. They also signed an ethical code which is the first time such an activity has been undertaken.

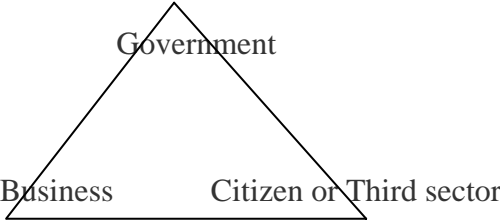
Ludmilla also gave some of her background. She is an architect who had been active for at least eight years in her neighborhood of Radvan where citizens conducted a two and a half year campaign to prevent the Shell Oil Company from constructing a gas station in the middle of their neighborhood that Chuck had mentioned the previous day. Following this campaign, she had been asked to run for city council and won. She described her experience as feeling uncomfortable in the setting of City Hall. She continues to feel more as an activist than as a politician. She learned early on the importance to inform and involve people and continues to fight for this right. It is her experience that considerable business interests block any interest to involve citizens. She eagerly joined BBA when there was consideration of forming such a group and was re-elected.

The long-term goal of the group is to eventually expand from their current 6 to a minimum of 16 and also to nominate and elect a candidate for Mayor as well. It is their belief that there should be three different components to help make the local political situation work better. There is a need for good people to run as politicians. There is also a need to "think tanks" to exist and to provide thoughtful reflection. They also believe that there is a need for citizen activists' structures that will push for important changes.

They gave a recent example of how far the city is from promoting active participation. During the previous year, city hall needed to prepare a plan for impending school closures. Several members from BBA had requested that a plan be prepared and discussed with city council before implementing any changes. They later learned that in fact a plan had been prepared by three members of city hall staff. This plan was done without any consultation of anyone outside the three including school officials, city council members or of course citizens. When time came for school closings to be announced, their plan was released and it created considerable turmoil from many sides. It was such a problem that the Mayor asked that the plan be stopped and re-done. It doesn't appear however that the lesson of the need for broad consultations has been learned. They indicated that Slovak law actually provides significant opportunities for participation but that the law is not followed or used to municipality's advantage.

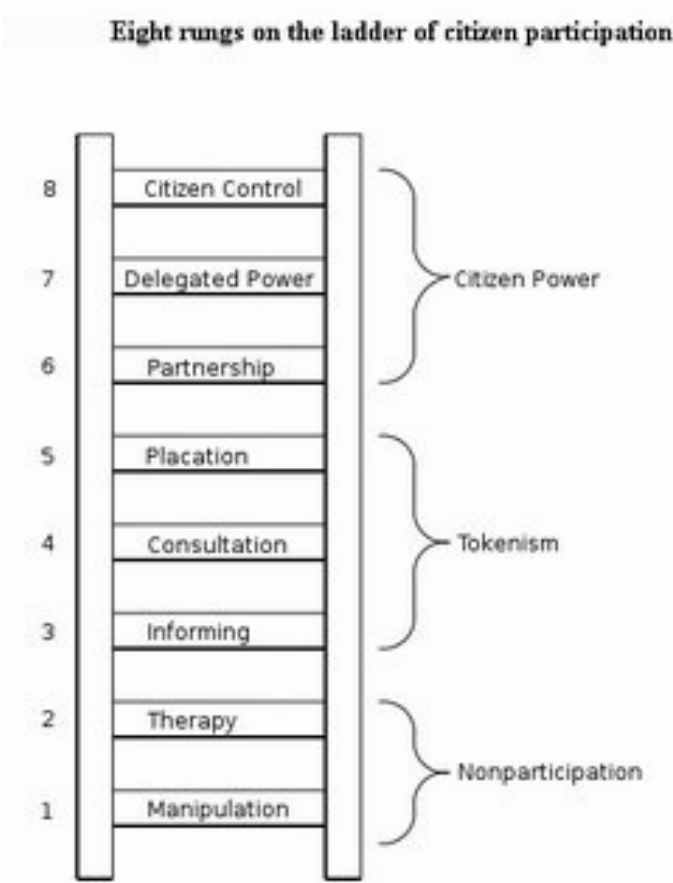
Additional points

Three additional items were raised related to the topic. The first was a consideration of the public arena in which there are three sectors:



In Central and Eastern Europe, the citizen or third sector is considerably underdeveloped. Very few citizen structures exist. The “post-Communist legacy” continues to make efforts to change this difficult. As a result, there are significant barriers to having citizens more actively participate. Even if governments were more open to active participation, it is complicated by the fact that citizens do not have structures which more easily allow them to engage. It was also pointed out however, that there are a few advantages that these structures do not exist. It is possible to create functional ones rather than having to alter existing ones that do not work.

The second item was the “ladder of participation”:



The Central and Eastern European region is characterized by very low levels of participation. Many localities struggle with whether citizens are even INFORMED. Reaching higher levels of participation rarely happens in this region. It is not valued nor are structures available to adequately support it. This is a significant difference for most Western European areas.

The final area discussion was the beginning of a discussion about the differences between community organizing and community development. The members of the group decided to begin a chart where we listed some of the possible differences. An initial brainstorming occurred and the start of a chart emerged.

	Community Development	Community Organizing
Relation to each other		
Values		
Role of staff and training		
Role of citizens and training		
Accountability (to whom?)		
Main activities / basic tasks		
Desired outcome		
Options for funding		
Attitude towards (own) power		”

Several items were raised in the discussion that followed. It was raised that in Germany there is an issue in community development where the work can expand from the community to a bridging role/ an intermediary role to a management role. Under state programs in Germany there is a goal to have citizens become involved and to own the solutions. Under community development, things are more under control and therefore more appealing to authorities. With community organizing, things are more “out of control” and thus can be more threatening to authorities.

Evening in the neighborhood

That evening the group attended a community meeting in Zvolen where the primary agenda was discussion about a strategy for improving parking in the neighborhood. The group had made contact with the School of Architecture in Bratislava and was interested in getting students to compete in a comprehensive plan for how to improve the serious problem of parking in the neighborhood. Following this meeting, they were invited to have pizza at the neighborhood restaurant. The owner of the pizza place has become active in the neighborhood and recently joined the CKO Board.



Conclusions

1. The discussion regarding community organizing was a very useful exercise. There seem to be a number of possibilities and opportunities for using this type of approach.
2. There was a helpful mix of presenting some of the theory, hearing from practitioners and actually attending a community meeting in Zvolen.
3. The session followed a structure and the pace went well including informal time.
4. An important term was raised – citizen/citizenship. It is a very significant word in our work but also raises many new issues and questions in the new realities of Europe.
5. The contrast of elected officials and organizers was important. It helped to see work to be done.
6. The Public arena diagram is a helpful way to describe part of our work.
7. The term used in community organizing “deliver people” is a new one for most and significant.
8. The group liked the idea of the stance of “never willing to be held hostage” to funding sources which is also used in community organizing.
9. Action seems to be a critical factor, (especially in the CEE region) which also needs to include reflection as well.
10. Partnerships (meaning local government initiated relationships with communities) seem to be much more a part of Western Europe. They are not very often found in the CEE region.
11. What will be the long term aspect of these partnerships?

12. On the other side, are they helpful or do they keep things under control and thus avoid necessary conflicts?
13. We should continue to work on the chart differentiating community organizing and community development