"WE AND THEY"

"NGOS' INFLUENCE ON DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES"

SPF

THE SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION

Edited by Tom Nicholson • 2008

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Contents

Visegrad's NGO sector still has much to contribute

The post-Communist countries of Central Europe have changed dramatically over the past two decades in many areas such as politics, economics, and society. On the one hand, many problems remain that cannot be solved by the government alone. Much room remains for positive contributions by the non-profit sector, such as in policy formulation and service delivery in particular areas. On the other hand, non-profit organizations in these countries are having trouble finding a clear role to play, and are facing many enormous challenges such as the withdrawal of foreign donors and rising demands for professionalism and accountability.

For these reasons, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation along with its Central Europe Fund decided to carry out research in all four countries of the Visegrad Alliance to investigate past, present and possible future contributions by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the socio-economic development of each country. To map the views of NGO actors, we cooperated with local partners: In the Czech Republic with the NETT think-tank, in Hungary with the Roots and Wings – Workshop for Change and Development , in Poland with the Institute for Public Affairs, and in Slovakia with the Center for Philanthropy.

Although the research was conducted based on a unified methodology and the questionnaires were prepared by the group of researchers who participated in it, the final reports that you will find in this publication show that the topic can be presented and interpreted from different angles. For this reason as well, each report includes an introduction and a slightly different style of writing. We hope that in this way the reader will get a broader picture of this important topic that could prove useful to anyone interested in it.

The country reports are presented in alphabetical order of the countries' names. The report summaries and lists of organizations or leaders interviewed can be found at the end of the publication.

We hope that this material stimulates further debate on this topic within each country, not just within the NGO sector but among the relevant stakeholders as well.

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Czech Republic

By Jan Kroupa and Josef Štogr,
NETT o.s. – the Civil Society Think Tank

Introduction

This document was put together – apart from existing research and ongoing discussions among the individual country research teams – on the basis of 30 interviews with a widely differentiated group of NGO and civil society leaders in the Czech Republic.

The interview findings are arranged in a narrative format to provide a rich and inspiring picture of this narrow topic. We also look back at developments over the previous 18 years, and examine the current situation and future prospects in order **to achieve a better understanding of all involved**. This text is mainly aimed at NGO representatives, social science students, academics, and national and local governments, but is also accessible to the public at large.

Direct quotations from interviews are printed anonymously in italics. The body of the text is divided into **two basic segments** – the first addresses partial themes following the flow of questions as answered by respondents, while the second interprets and summarizes. A typological summary is attached at the end of the paper.

The outcomes have been set in the **context of Central and Eastern Europe**. The same questions were also asked in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Comments or questions regarding the Czech segment of this research paper can be sent to nett@aid.cz.

Jan Kroupa and Josef Štogr

Us and them

**Interviews with NGO leaders and other opinion-makers from the civic move-
ment conduced within this research project reveal that in the Czech Republic
there are several enormously varied and incompatible lines of thought on
the roles of NGOs. Should the NGO sector as it is currently understood be
kept together as a valid concept? Or it is artificial, outdated and unsustaina-
ble either legislatively or socially? What roles do NGOs really play towards
the government? What roles should they play? Who defines these roles, and
who should define them?**

**Having done this research, we are convinced that the NGO concept is a valid
one, and that it is crucial that it be sustained as a whole with all of its multi-
ple, varied, sometimes blurry and seemingly incompatible roles. But let's not
get ahead of ourselves - let's start from the beginning.**

*"There are things we just enjoy, that make us feel good, and that make our lives more
appealing. I'm involved in many things, I organize all different sorts of events in coop-
eration with the government as well as with sponsors. What's important is to bring
people together and, of course, to do as much as we can with the little resources we
have. This is significantly different from the 'maximize the profit' agenda. This is where
I see the difference."*

NGOs?

Most respondents understand non-profit, non-government organizations (hereaf-
ter 'NGOs') as a **duality between their mission**, which expresses their authentic
interests, **and their external limitations**, which prevent the distribution of profits
to stakeholders (making a profit is not prevented). Given that the entities con-
cerned are restricted in how they manage their profits, it can be assumed that the
legal entity in question would not have been set up had there not been another
significant reason – the one summarized in their mission statement.

Some typical descriptions of NGOs:

- o *A group of people who share a common interest (mission) and have an
  institutional format;*
- o *A space for people to be active who do not wish to become involved in
  politics or be employed by the authorities;*

o   *An organization that strives to engage people, the object of its efforts to help, through its mission;*
o   *A body that does not focus on maximizing profits, and that invests what profit it makes into mission-related activities;*
o   *Organizations that are not after economic profits but something else, and that address issues that the government and businesses have no time for;*
o   *Entities that do not redistribute their financial surplus;*
o   *Organizations that can make a profit but have no owners, so there is no one to take that profit home;*
o   *Organizations that deal with unconventional issues that do not appeal to the masses;*
o   *Organizations that get the ball rolling.*

Some respondents refused to see NGOs as a single type of entity, and argued that 'NGO' is an artificial umbrella term that carries negative connotations. They pointed out various other ways of defining such organizations, and divided them between **voluntary and semi-professional**, those that use primarily members and volunteers with minimum professional background, and **professional organizations,** whose activities are carried out by staff. There are very few mixed formats, which are mostly found among environmental organizations.

Second, the most commonly used division is according to the type of legal entity, such as between OS (**civic associations**), which are internally democratic, and OPS (**public benefit corporations**), which are always ruled by an external entity – the founder - through appointed representatives. **Foundations** and funds, i.e. endowed entities, form a separate group.

With respect to historical changes and processes, many respondents noted that 1989 was not "point zero". Some organizations transformed from pre-revolution times, others returned from exile, some revived their activities after a spell of forced inactivity, and of course a group was set up and developed after 1990. Respondents noted that NGOs should not be seen as comprising only the last group, even though it is precisely this **'narrow' definition** that most respondents applied to NGOs. Some also mentioned that NGOs were better understood through **where they raise their funding and other support** than through their legal format or history.

After the collapse of the regime
Most respondents described **several phases** rather than turning points in the history of Czech NGOs. Even the separation of Czechoslovakia in 1993 was not seen as an important turning point. Answers to this question differed substantially in line with the focus of respondents (social, environmental, human rights, foundations etc.)

The initial phase is often characterized as an **epoch of naive enthusiasm** and chaos, a time when the state allowed NGOs to grow without intervention. This period was followed by **a learning phase**, in the sense of both building internal organizational capacity and securing funding. This epoch was characterized by the presence of American private donors and donor agencies. The following phase saw **the departure of American private foundations** and the initial stages of pre-accession and later structural **funding from the European Union**. The last phase was described as an **era of network development**, sometimes peaking in social entrepreneurship.

Another model applied repeatedly was derived from political developments. According to this point of view, the first period was linked to the appointment of Václav Klaus to the national government and to the **breakdown of the Czech and Slovak Federation**. Some respondents stated that by the mid-1990s, all hopes that the Czech Republic would create open and welcoming circumstances for NGOs died. Open and relatively cooperative state and regional authorities were closed, while NGOs were assigned new roles without wanting or asking for them, and without changing in any way. This was followed by the **weakening of formerly liberal legislation**. From this point of view, it was clear by the year 2000 what the game was all about: the state was trying to gain control over NGOs, accepting them as official partners only when the EU funded the projects or as a mere formality. Important politicians cast doubt on the main roles of NGOs, which represent no one in the partisan system. When it comes to national governance, NGOs are either being **pressured into becoming service providers** according to the demands of public administration, **or into interest groups** that are starting to be labeled as **'mutually beneficial'.** Some of their principal characteristics and identifying features are being deliberately undermined – their mission, creativity and innovative potential. The fact that they are vehicles of civic activity is also being suppressed.

Yet another model used by respondents is the consensual model, which is characterized by deep cooperation between NGOs and the state, underlining **the capacity of NGOs to be very creative in identifying various forms of cooperation**. From this point of view, the temporary 'apolitical' government of Josef Tošovský in the late 1990s was viewed as very positive. It was praised for passing the law on foundations and endowed funds, the law on public benefit corporations, for redistributing funds from the Foundation Investment Fund among Czech Foundations (a fund that was given 1% of the proceeds of voucher privatization in the Czech Republic), for developing the Government Council of NGOs, and others.

From the **point of view of the public and the corporate sector**, the successes achieved by NGOs during the delivery of aid and rebuilding works during and following the great **floods of 1997 and 2002** were seen as important turning points. NGOs succeeded in raising great support, and in the course of the second wave of floods nearly all funding was channeled to NGOs set up after 1989.

In these descriptions, great differences were seen among respondents, as seen in the following responses:

- *By the mid 1990s the state administration had become completely closed, and NGOs 'received' different roles without having to make any significant internal changes;*
- *From the mid 1990s formerly benign legislation was weakened, and politicians began to question the fundamental roles of NGOs in society;*
- *By the mid 1990s, it was clear what the game was all about;*
- *A kind of quiet 'normalization' occured as people retreated back into their private worlds and their hobbies;*
- *NGO networks were set up, planting NGO representatives in political elites. Thanks to that, the wall became even less penetrable, and NGOs began operating as power alibis;*
- *Efforts were made to pressure NGOs into roles where they will respond to public contracts.*

On the other hand:

- *NGOs formed an inseparable part of public life as partners to corporate and individual donors; there is ever increasing support for NGOs from people and corporations;*
- *Having accessed the EU, their role and prestige grew, and they began competing with businesses;*
- *Social entrepreneurs and other non-profit formats came into existence as entities whose proceeds are not distributed to those who invested;*
- *Slowly, the paradigm has been changing, and NGOs are gaining increasingly greater roles as partners to the government; despite the complaints of activists who want to achieve changes overnight and are continually unhappy, the overall trend is clearly positive.*

At this point we can detect **several completely different lines of thought** that have **no common denominator** and that concern how the roles of the state are perceived. During the period of time in question, people's perception of the state changed dramatically. After 1993, optimism gradually disappeared, and people

sensed a tendency towards bureaucracy and increasing **state intervention into the public domain** and into their private lives. This process was seen differently by different NGOs. Some, for instance foundations, were less affected, while others, especially service providers, were impacted severely. This general shift may be described as follows:

"Relationships between NGOs and the state are only a reflection of the general state of affairs and of the relationship between citizens and the government. NGOs simply make this situation more clear and obvious, for they tend to concentrate people who are capable of reflection and of acting independently. The NGO sector is a mirror of society as such."

Roles

Most respondents described two types of organizations: **service providers** and **advocacy** or activist organizations. Service providers are then subdivided according to whether they provide services on the basis of their own **authentic missions**, or whether they implement **government contracts** or policies. Activist roles are further divided into roles as **initiators and leaders of public discussions,** and roles that **preserve traditions, traditional values and cultural forms**.

Watchdogs, minority and civil rights activists were mentioned separately. Respondents also clearly recognized the roles of **think tanks** and groups that analyze social contexts, as well as entities that help to formulate questions and highlight current trends.

In addition to seeing the above roles in a social context, we noted yet another **function-based** and complex segmentation. According to this group of respondents, NGO roles may be summarized as follows:

- o *Safeguards against totalitarian systems – they monitor the state, but live in their own world;*
- o *Hothouses for growing political programs and politically active individuals;*
- o *Schools of democracy in practice, electing boards, making compromises and forming missions;*
- o *Mirroring dysfunctional national and local government structures;*
- o *Identifying and highlighting 'blind spots' – introducing overlooked themes into public discourse;*
- o *Field laboratories that test out new forms of work and unexamined practices;*
- o *Integrating and linking platforms that bring thoughts in from 'the outside';*

o   *Offering jobs to people who would have a hard time making it in the business world.*

Shifts in roles

In the early 1990s, people started daring to do *what they enjoyed and what they couldn't do before, naively believing that a fundamental change was possible in the social climate.* At the same time, respondents said that the potential of this period was not fully explored: *"We were not self-assured enough, we should have been tougher, making use of all our opportunities. Still, we had no idea about some things, and kept finding that we were totally unprepared."* This period is described somewhat idealistically as a '**lost paradise**'.

In the outlined scheme, a period of **disillusionment** naturally followed, a crossroads between professionalism and voluntarism. Respondents stated that the sector shrank due to external pressure from the state, which made funding and subsidies conditional on increasingly more detailed calls for proposals. This in turn reduced the importance of authentic missions, and increased competition among NGOs, which were busy staking out their territories and areas of influence.

The third phase, which continues today, was perceived optimistically by one group of respondents, who said they saw **processes enabling** new entities to be formed, particularly **at the community level**. Another group of respondents was critical of the **great pressure from the government** to reduce NGO activities to the provision of services and to 'tolerated' advocacy coordinated with the state.

From the consensual point of view, the present situation is seeing the creation of a **suitable and balanced system**, with individual organizations working in partnership with the government not only as service providers but also as experts. According to this line of thought, specialized organizations and umbrella groups are positioned to advocate and to lobby. However, most respondents believed that the government is growing far stronger:
"Technocratic thinking has taken over."

Respondents also pointed out that some **state-centered concepts are being introduced by important NGO stakeholders themselves**, who count on cooperation with the government and who are not thrilled by the rich and colorful array of different organizations.
"Attempts by the government and some NGOs to set up a new National Front (a communist umbrella organization uniting all non-party organizations in the country during the previous regime – ed. note) have caused a profound change, producing many conflicts and ruining many relationships."

"This society does not care for culture or lasting values. We live in a world where everybody finds their own place in life. And I assume that people who make money enjoy doing it."

Ideal roles

"NGOs should contribute to a better, more cultured life in this country. Not for themselves, not for others, but so we can all somehow live together. They should pay more attention to changing the overall climate so that people who do not understand NGOs support them nonetheless. Such support should naturally be financial, but above all it should be prestigious. It's about changing the climate in society. That's what we should all be working on."

Several principal attitudes were apparent on the question of what the ideal roles of NGOs should be. One could be described as a '**civic**' understanding that sees NGOs as primarily empowering and building civil society. Many respondents would like to see this happen, but most doubt it is realistic in today's society:

"It would be best to play as many roles as we can, yet there are some fundamental decisions all NGOs have to make. Above all, they should know whether they want to be strong and free social players or sidekicks of the government. This is quite important. It's where I see the fundamental dividing line, and I don't hear us or other NGOs answering."

For most respondents, reflections on ideal roles were intertwined with thoughts about what is real, about what can be achieved:

"We should be more daring; there should be more organizations financially independent of both the national and local governments. Ideally, there should be some NGOs who dare to speak their minds freely because they do not have to be careful about what they say in front of those who pay them."

Some respondents pointed out that the optimum roles of NGOs could not be described without **describing the ideal roles of governments**, which is a **matter of politics**, not social research. According to one respondent:

"In terms of ideal roles, I see two areas for NGO activity – one delineated purely by people's activities, their inputs and interests, and the other delineated by the failures of the government. This is very hard to optimize, for there is no such thing as an ideal government. The main thing that NGOs bring to public affairs is their interest, enthusiasm and interaction."

When asked about ideal roles, most respondents wished that the government would accept and appreciate the initiative, activist and watchdog roles of NGOs as

a way of balancing tendencies towards bureaucracy and political routine. The government should also appreciate that NGOs cultivate the commercial sector.

Thus, the ideal array of roles little resembles the roles identified in the previous paragraphs. In particular, there was an explicit call for NGOs to play the role of an **enfant terrible** - unrestricted, free, and unchained to the point of being intolerable, completely unregulated and altogether independent of the government. Such NGOs set extreme examples and push the envelope, allowing a vast array of other entities to find their place and to cooperate in the manner and extent with the government and each other that they see fit.

Proponents of the consensual approach do not share this view, and argue that the optimum roles of NGOs should be guaranteed by the **free space for NGO activities through international cooperation** and the European human rights concept.

Real roles

Responses to questions about the real roles that NGOs will play in their relationships with national and local governments in the future revealed **optimism** among those who see the importance of NGOs primarily in the **context of people's activities and interactions**. This group expected that the formation of active groups and the growth of leaders would continue regardless of positive and negative attitudes or of the strength of external influences. They said they expected that the importance of local donors, both individual and corporate, will continue to increase, and that conditions for NGOs that maintain their independence from public funding will gradually improve. These organizations will counterbalance the partisan system, in which public policy is made beyond public control in non-transparent, lobby-driven processes. According to the optimists, **NGOs will succeed as partners** of the government not because the government welcomes them, but because they will become a natural and inseparable part of **what the public expects**.

At this point, however, the optimists are in the minority. Respondents tended towards pessimism, especially those who regard activist roles for NGOs as important, and who see that the **establishment is trying to reduce NGOs to public policy implementation agencies without a mission of their own** and with no opportunities to influence the formation of such policies.

The consensual group of respondents saw the increase in **NGO service provision** as a positive phenomenon, and noted **improvements in quality**, **standards** and so on. Another group of respondents claimed that the current state of affairs was

stable and would not change greatly because the **willingness to be controversial** and to cause conflicts **is decreasing**, while the external pressure to conform keeps increasing: "*Whatever we failed to accomplish so far has no chance of succeeding now, at least not in the near future.*" "*There is no unity, no leading vision, so we are just treading water.*"

In terms of future roles, the end of NGO funding from EU structural funds after the 2007-2013 budget period was seen as both inevitable and very significant.

Barriers and limitations
One group of respondents that saw key turning points after 1989 and changing roles for NGOs stated that:
- o   *There is less altruism and more competition;*
- o   *Lifestyles keep changing, requiring greater engagement; people have less time to be active in NGOs, and such activities are not generally valued;*
- o   *The media supports consumer lifestyles rather than NGO activities;*
- o   *Historical patterns of behavior, thought and interaction still apply – we are mentally dependent on the government;*
- o   *People are afraid to buck the mainstream.*

The government plays a clear role in promoting such an unfavorable climate:
- o   *Legislation is confusing and puts everybody off;*
- o   *Inequality remains between the circumstances for NGOs and those for entities financed by the national or local governments;*
- o   *NGOs are pressured by red tape that is forced on them;*
- o   *The government is trying to increase its control and power.*

Some respondents also had neutral feelings about the unfavorable circumstances:
- o   *NGOs have a hard time taking care of themselves, they can't afford to step over the line and look around;*
- o   *Our financial circumstances are bad;*
- o   *Weariness from the incessant struggle to survive is beginning to show;*
- o   *The money available in the private sector is insufficient to enable semi-voluntary activities;*
- o   *Donors support the most obvious charitable causes rather than long-term, complex issues that are hard to understand.*

By contrast, proponents of the consensual attitude pointed out that:
- o   *Not enough time has passed, and society is still immature;*
- o   *Patterns have not changed yet;*

    o   *We have not yet absorbed the overall EU climate and all the changes brought about by the human rights concept.*

Internal problems were clearly identified – there was general agreement in this respect:

    o   *NGOs tend to think that they are the best, but enthusiasm cannot always make up for a lack of quality and insight;*

    o   *NGOs themselves accept their lack of finances, so their people are over-worked and have no time to educate themselves;*

    o   *NGOs spend their time on finding ways to secure funding, and pay no attention to long-term strategies;*

    o   *NGOs are afraid they will hurt their reputations in the eyes of the authorities by partnering with other organizations or specific people;*

    o   *NGOs do not understand what the government expects from them and are afraid they will be put on the 'black list';*

    o   *NGO are not doing enough to develop voluntary work and raise very little support in their communities; they rely on the government, and sometimes they are even restricted by groups that could not care less about constituency support.*

In general, most responses addressing NGO roles revealed great confusion over how to link apparently incompatible roles and social functions. This inner contradiction of NGOs – should they be seen as a whole? – was noted by all respondents. However, **no one saw any way to move forward**, to change the **deadlocked situation**, or to bring in outside help.

Another layer of NGO self-reflection came across in numerous complaints about the **lack of leaders**. A growing number of young NGO people are choosing careers outside the NGO sector, which offers them few prospects, while for another set of young people, working for an NGO is a job just like any other, and not one that generates great enthusiasm. NGOs are establishing themselves as experts in various fields, but their bureaucratic and administrative agendas also keep growing – to such an extent that they are sometimes hard to distinguish from government institutions and agencies set up to implement public policies. Respondents also often mentioned the **inability** of NGOs **to market themselves**.
"The way it works is through personal prestige, through people and things that are 'in'. If you go against that you will be marginalized – this happens every time an NGO pretends to be better than the others."

Strategic decision-making

Most respondents agreed that some **NGOs had succeeded in influencing some strategic decisions** made by national, regional or local governments. When asked how they had done so, the respondents were again polarized. One group **ascribed the failures to radicals** who pursued unrealistic goals and employed controversial methods that had more negative than positive effects. The recent failure of anti-discrimination legislation was repeatedly cited as an example: after heavy lobbying, a radical form of the bill was submitted and failed to be passed – in fact, no legislation was passed at all. According to these respondents, the radicals eventually became an argument against passing the bill: *"It's an issue, because radicals cause senseless conflicts."* This more moderate group promotes the following work formats because they lead to success*:*

- o *Flexibility;*
- o *Serious approach;*
- o *Citing positive examples and good practice, including from abroad;*
- o *Cooperation between NGOs and the EU;*
- o *Working with politicians;*
- o *Personal relationships with government officials and managers;*
- o *Setting rules, developing a system;*
- o *Making use of pressure exerted by international organizations;*
- o *High-quality lobbying during the legislative process.*

Another group counted on an **overall change in climate** and **their own activities**. They believed a positive impact was achieved by:

- o *Pressuring NGOs to evaluate their own activities;*
- o *Coming up with new issues that the government has ignored or does not know about;*
- o *Cultivating the public domain;*
- o *Increasing the prestige of NGOs in society;*
- o *Transferring issues to another platform, either more general or more specific;*
- o *Identifying synergies with external pressures;*
- o *Standing one's ground, being committed and hardheaded;*
- o *Usurping the roles of public administration officials.*

The Temelín nuclear power plant and freeway construction were mentioned most frequently as problems. Activist organizations **keep losing in these cases**, and in addition turn large segments of **the public against their actions**. On the other hand, some argue that the seemingly unsuccessful pressure by NGOs actually pre-

vented the government and large investors from going ahead with their plans, because **the actions of the government are influenced by its expectations of resistance**.

At the same time, a number of NGO **successes** were mentioned, especially in the field of **legislation** (domestic violence legislation, drug legislation in the early 1990s, environmental education, waste legislation, etc.), **stopping some construction projects** (the locks on the Labe River, the Turnov – Jičín freeway, some waste disposal plants, golf courses in nature reserves, and so on).

Many NGOs are quite content to work with individual ministries on designing various documents. Paradoxically, their successes include the fact that the parliament has **repeatedly failed to pass** bills proposing to **abolish the right to participate in administrative and public consultations granted to NGOs**, although these rights have been partially restricted several times. This clearly shows that in some respects, NGOs are now defending what was achieved in the early 1990s under more favorable circumstances.

Here, the controversy over the nature of NGOs and the way in which they should work is at its strongest. One group of respondents believes it is best to present the state with **pre-negotiated proposals submitted on behalf of NGOs by an umbrella** body, such as the Government Council for NGOs. Critics of this approach point out that NGOs should reflect a plurality of opinions, and that any attempt to push them under an umbrella, uniting them in a single social front, is reminiscent of the ideology from our Communist past.

Respondents frequently argued that society had failed to eliminate the common practice of doing things through **personal contacts** and in a non-transparent manner. At the same time, they described partnerships based on mutually beneficial relations as rather tricky, for they **encourage NGOs to avoid controversial themes** which often need to be highlighted before they can be improved. **Public debate** is seen as the right approach in this respect. Respondents also called for a change in the current situation, in which the government chooses allies in the NGO sector to approve of or praise its actions.

Introducing and promoting completely **new themes in public debates and policies** – such as environmental education, hospice care, etc. – were clearly seen as a success. Again, NGOs were praised for their involvement during the floods, as well as for organizing and delivering international aid during humanitarian and natural catastrophes.

Representatives of foundations agreed that the distribution of aid by the Foundation Investment Fund (NIF) was a major success. Respondents were then asked if they thought that the successes of NGOs were seen the same way by the public. Environmental NGO representatives tended to answer in the negative; their PR strategies rely on their own public campaigns, and they do not expect the public to understand the context of issues on their own. On the other hand, some optimists saw a gradual improvement in the general awareness that NGOs can help solve issues in society, as shown by the increasing willingness to give and by the rising support for NGOs from individual and corporate donors.

Public consultation proceedings

Most respondents agreed that NGOs had achieved *significant* or *partial* successes by participating in public consultations and other administrative proceedings.

As a result, most respondents described methods that led to success in this respect. In comparison with the previous questions, the group that opposed the consensual approach stood out even more clearly:

- o *Successes in minor local cases, where people see that it pays not to be passive, are the most important;*
- o *A different line of thought is the key; you have to head for the goal with no regard for traditional procedures, in fact, without regard for anything. This often cleared up the situation.*

Critical answers included the following:

- o *Many NGOs do not publicly proceed in such a manner, they rely instead on time-tested methods such as using personal contacts and influencing groups;*
- o *In some cases, the results of NGO lobbying are nothing to be proud of; for instance, people with disabilities pushed through an absolutely unbelievable law on social services.*

From another point of view:

- o *It is important that the level of quality is changing – NGOs are growing more professional in their work, and they have better and more targeted arguments;*
- o *We have to use the language of public officials and local politicians;*
- o *It is important to make good use of cooperation mechanisms;*
- o *Wherever NGOs succeed in affecting the initial circumstances (being chosen to sit on boards and committees), they can make a change, whereas in other cases they can only slow things down;*

o   *We have to be trustworthy and principled, constantly offering our approaches and solutions based on European notions of fairness, decency and rights;*

o   *We need to argue with reference to cases from abroad: "It works like that everywhere";*

o   *We represent certain moral strengths linked to European culture and the EU;*

o   *We had some successes in the framework of the Council on Advertising, and participated in the debate on the ethical nature of advertisements; that's a sign of the influence that NGOs have which exert pressure on the Council.*

Respondents stressed that NGOs – often with no chance of succeeding – formally slowed down administrative proceedings, striving to discourage investors or to force the government to look for a different solution. In this respect, the **lack of lawyers** who represent or work with NGOs is of great significance.

Respondents for the first time reflected on relationships between **NGOs and local governments** as a specific issue. They looked at community care planning and other strategic documents, including master zoning plans, etc. Such processes are for the most part a mere formality and have failed to meet expectations, although some respondents noted some pleasing exceptions. However, it is clear that introducing a system did not provide a solution, but only created the potential for: (1) a purely formal use of the tool – i.e. manipulation by the local government, or (2) truly active participation by a wide array of local players. How and to what degree this potential will be realized is completely up to the local stakeholders. The key is for the formalized tools to be used by **strong leaders** – both from the NGO sector and from local government.

Any changes?
Most respondents expected **some changes** in roles and relationships among NGOs and all levels of government in the future, but a **significant group expected no significant change at all**. According to them, the situation is deadlocked, and we can expect nothing but a continuation of current trends. At the same time, most respondents could not imagine that the current state of affairs could be maintained over the long term.

In NGO-government relations, **philanthropic giving** seems to be the key issue. If the government abolishes the current minor tax incentive to give – as happened in Slovakia, for instance – it will have a long-term negative impact on the overall climate. The significance of local philanthropy is expected to grow, no matter what

happens, but it will make a big difference whether this happens because of government policy or despite it.

Respondents expected that parliament will ultimately succeed in its attempts to **limit the participation of NGOs in consultation proceedings** as well as in the general design of public policy, and that the **government's control of NGOs will grow** and become more strict. Respondents interpreted the **new draft civil code** and other legislative changes in this light, and generally expected a worsening of circumstances and conditions for NGOs:

"It will only get worse – what seems like a problem today will soon seem like paradise lost."

Some respondents saw **no future for small professional organizations**, whose current circumstances give them no chance of long-term survival. In future, some expect that the **gap between government-funded service providers on the one hand and activist organizations on the other will grow**. They expect that what today we identify as **the NGO sector** will disappear or **will split into two or more groups**. One group will comprise entities that are closely linked to the government and have few or no ties to the second group, which will be independent of the government and openly critical of or neutral towards it.

On the other hand, the optimists expected that NGOs will gradually succeed in developing **relations with regional governments**, profiling themselves as social economy organizations and producing a **pool of people who will become involved in strategic issues at the regional and local levels**, representing a progressive force in society. According to them, NGOs will continue to gain the respect of the public.

From this point of view, **European funding may be viewed as an opportunity** that should be taken advantage of in the next several years, **enabling NGOs to achieve the necessary changes** – but only if these funds are not consumed by operational costs. It is also expected that when the money from structural EU funds is gone, NGOs will face huge problems, and that large, highly bureaucratic organizations that have lost the capacity to respond flexibly to change will fall apart.

Several respondents also identified which changes could not be expected. **No one expected a social vision**, a momentum or a process strong enough to change the current unfavorable situation. Nor did any respondent expect NGOs themselves to make gradual improvements in the climate without some kind of catharsis or conflict. Other respondents said that NGOs are a natural expression of people's desire to be active, so they will always have a place and grow regardless of external cir-

cumstances. These people saw no danger of NGOs falling totally under the sway of the government, regardless of the temptations to do so.

Answers looking to the future clearly reflected the critical views that respondents held of the afore-mentioned negative trends towards consumerism, increasing government influence and control, and a reduction in the self-confidence and activities of individuals:

"Something has to happen in this society, people can't take the current ethical and moral mess forever. Perhaps it's naďve, but I feel very strongly that the government is degrading me from a citizen to a consumer. People don't talk about how they want to live their lives and what kind of life they want for their kids. They only care how much butter costs."

And again:

"We are unable to overcome the dependence of NGOs on the government and on pubic budgets, and this will continue until at least 2014. We have to search for other formats and alternatives to today's NGOs, which are dependent on funds and subsidies."

Strategies and recommendations

Strategic deliberations on future NGO support and development should be based on **the four approaches or groups outlined** above. Most respondents view the NGO sector as full of internal contradictions. Nonetheless, there is no general agreement as to whether it would be better for the NGO sector to split into two or more groups whose members would have more in common with each other, or whether this would represent a threat.

The authors of this text believe that that it is **highly desirable for the NGO sector to stay together as a whole,** however great its internal divisions. Aside from our work and discussions in the course of this research and our previous work on this theme, we based our conclusions on a recent study of relationships between "pragmatic" and "purist" NGOs in the USA[1]. More extreme approaches legitimize and create room for generally acceptable approaches, which then cease to be viewed as controversial. In addition, should atomization of the NGO sector take place, external pressures will affect each separate segment just as much as they oppress the whole today.

Instead of division, we think it would be positive if today's NGO sector were expanded and enriched to include other non-profit, non-commercial entities that are independent of the government. This would strengthen the NGO sector and its influence, as it would **expand the group of entities that form the generally accepted NGO sector**. Above all, new NGO entities should include independent educational research and scientific institutions, some associations and umbrella groups, cultural organizations, etc. By raising awareness that the NGO sector is rich and diverse, NGO leaders could help to smooth conflicts between the proponents of different approaches (e.g. groups A and C).

In addition, if the NGO sector divides, the government could then separate NGOs between those it accredits as **"general benefit" organizations**, and non-conformist, watchdog, advocacy and innovative entities that would be relegated to the "second row". Legislation introducing such a division is now being discussed in the Czech Republic (the draft civil code).

Understanding
This is an area in which **NGOs themselves** can be active, although they have been more or less disregarded by the government. Legislation that should be defended

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1   Conner Alana, Epstein Keith: Harnessing Purity and Pragmatism, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Fall 2007

at all costs includes a guarantee of NGO participation in **administrative pro-ceedings** or making donations tax-deductible (i.e. the **percentage tax assigna-tion**).

In the next several years we can expect the extensive **development of partner-ships with local** and, in the case of larger NGOs, with **regional governments**, in particular in implementing larger **EU projects**. The transformation of the system of residential social care holds out many great opportunities for NGOs, as long as they keep their position as **the owners of progressive know-how,** and as experts who were implementing social service quality standards back when no legislation was pressuring them to do so. For some time, this will be the **only feature distin-guishing them** from government-run establishments.

Watchdogs and advocacy organizations have to **develop their constituencies**. They argue that they can't do this without funding, and that they can't raise funds without constituencies. The truth is, constituencies include donors, so in a way there is no reason to separate these two tasks – it means **more private funding** and everything that comes with it.

These are just some of the main points; many more emerged from the interviews. But one fundamental issue stood out in the course of this research: we all have to **develop the ways in which we understand ourselves, one another**, **our part-ners, attitudes, goals and roles**. The same goes for our partners; otherwise our understanding will not benefit us. If we do not do this, NGOs will remain the vic-tims of short-term agendas and other people's games, passive **recipients of roles assigned or left to them by the state, which has usurped most of the public domain**. This is the first step that should precede all other steps and approaches.

Donors
The basic concepts for support should thus rest on the following theses:
- o The overall NGO sector should be quantitatively expanded; a **wide perception** of the sector should be preferred to the current "narrow" one;
- o Support should **not reduce the diversity** of the overall NGO sector.

Specific goals for support should be designed separately for each of the identified groups of NGOs. The above segmentation (A-D) may be applied. Overall goals for support to individual types of entities could include the following:
1) Support for entities which participate in **developing** true (i.e. not only formal) **partnerships between NGOs and government**; supporting entities that are capable of being experts and guarantors in given

fields or within a given region, thus allowing them to provide feedback and consultation to the state and cultivate public processes;

2) Support for the "initiators" who directly **participate in formulating public policies**, developing their authentic missions, presenting these in a community context to local governments as an impulse for action, thereby exerting pressure for such social objectives to be accepted and supported;

3) Complementary strategy: Supporting NGOs that work completely in-dependently of the state, primarily in the critical opponent role. As stated above, the role of radical NGOs (in particular from group D) is crucial: it is necessary to maintain the "middle" roles, making the identi-fied context sustainable in the long term.

Hungary

By Gabriella Benedek and Tamás Scsaurszki
Roots and Wings – Workshop for Development and Change

Introduction

One of the key factors influencing how an NGO[2] operates is its relationship with the state. This relationship is complex and contains various aspects. On the one hand, the state establishes the legal and economic framework for the operation of NGOs, and enforces their compliance. Most financial support for the NGO sector also comes from government subsidies, while the state is the largest contractual partner of the NGO sector. On the other hand, many organizations monitor and aim to change the way the state works, and call on the state (and its institutions) to take their values and views into account.

The authors of this paper started from the assumption that an analysis of the way this relationship worked in practice would encourage a re-think of existing roles, create new strategic roles, and bring about a more conscious approach to the way they were carried out, which would subsequently increase the success of these organizations. Thus, the following material focuses on the relationship between NGOs and the state.

We knew that the organizations to be interviewed currently have or have had a relationship with the state, and have tried or are trying to influence the decision-making processes of the state. We thought that the relationship would also be affected by how our respondents identified the sector, what they emphasized as its characteristics, and how they interpreted the history of the sector. We assumed that it would be possible to identify the different roles of NGOs in their relationship with the state in practice, which could then be analyzed.

Our research is based on 25 interviews carried out between October 2007 and January 2008.

First, we would like to express our gratitude to everyone who took the time to complete the almost two-hour semi-structured interviews, and who gave us their opinions and shared their stories and experiences with us. We would also like thank Éva Kuti and István Sebestény for their valuable comments on the first draft of this document.

For the interviews, we approached those organizations we regarded as having

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2   In referring to NGOs, we use the statistical definition of NGOs throughout the document.

long-term, active and consciously designed relationships with the state. Our find-ings are relevant to *these* organizations, not to all NGOs. We tried to work with a wide range of organizations by considering their field of activity, the length of their existence, and whether they have received significant foreign support. We were also careful to include local and national organizations, those from the capi-tal as well as from the countryside, and individual organizations as well as allianc-es. Still, this study reflects the views of only a minority in the non-profit sector. At the same time we hope that by summarizing these experiences and opinions, we can contribute to the efforts of other organizations to form a relationship with the state, and thereby help them to achieve their goals.

We use the term 'state' in this paper whenever we refer to any part of the state, whether at the national or local level, and to people or institutions involved in the preparation or making of decisions.

Because we learned about the relationship between NGOs and the state solely from the experience and feedback of NGOs, we recommend this summary of our research primarily to them. We hope it will be useful to them in a practical sense, and help them to form a more effective relationship with the state and influence it to achieve their own goals.

In the following pages we summarize the answers to our questions and then present our own comments, questions and recommendations.
If you have any comments or questions regarding the report on Hungary, please write to us at rootsandwings@rootsandwings.eu

Gabriella Benedek and Tamás Scsaurszki
Roots and Wings – Workshop for Development and Change

The identity of the NGO sector

Key characteristics of NGOs
According to our respondents, the most important characteristic of NGOs is that they are useful to the public: that through their actions they intend to serve the common good and meet public needs. One in five respondents also regarded the independence and autonomy of such organizations as important, and said that NGOs should provide an opportunity to carry out self-organized activities and al-low people to experience a sense of community. Beyond these prerequisites, sev-eral people mentioned that NGOs should also be voluntary and problem-oriented, that they should have high-quality expertise, and that they should represent spe-cial interests and be non-profit organizations.

Half of the respondents emphasized the fact that the terms 'non-governmental organization' and 'non-profit organization' have been used to refer to different things. Naturally, the definitions vary depending on which values one believes are most important. Some felt that the term 'non-governmental organization' (or 'civil organization' in Hungarian) referred primarily to its independence from the state and its autonomy (in terms of its establishment, operation and financing). Other respondents associated the term 'civil' with its being voluntary and self-organizing and thought it might even mean that the organization operates but is not regis-tered.

Some felt that the terms 'civil' or 'non-profit' should not be used at all. Others thought that the current definition distinguishes these organizations from the pri-vate and state sectors, and does not represent what is common between non-profit organizations. Still others believed that none of these terms express the varied nature of the sector: the various – and often conflicting – values, interests and operational processes of different organizations. Indeed, given such profound differences, several people were unsure whether it was still possible to talk about *one* sector.

Important milestones and trends in the history of the sector since 1989
From the answers to the question about the history of the sector since 1989, it seems that NGOs have very different views about the last 20 years. These often conflicting views are further complicated by differences in how the sector's his-toric milestones are perceived. Some people cited the actions of different govern-ments, others related them to certain laws, and some pointed to changing finan-

cial resources. Many said that rather than milestones, only processes could be identified. Others argued that the sector is undergoing continuous change, where no turning points can be identified.

Despite the significant differences in opinion, the following three periods emerged from the answers:

During the first half of the 1990s, building on the enthusiasm and the mobilization of the public, coupled with the legal framework and the financial resources available, the Hungarian NGO sector rapidly came into existence. NGOs believe that during this period the state was most open to negotiating, discussing and solving any problems raised. Organizations at the municipal level mentioned that it was a great loss for them when their activists, having been elected as local government representatives, left the sector.

The period from the second half of the 1990s to the early part of the following decade was viewed by respondents as more controversial, especially the relationship between the state and NGOs. During this period, NGOs were focused more on the state. On the one hand, thanks to government subsidies and the stability of other resources, the sector grew quickly, its infrastructure expanded, the number of paid employees increased, and NGOs moved into the public eye as a result of the '1% law'. This was when institutionalization 'in the positive sense' appeared. The first strong service-providing organizations came into existence (mainly in the social sector), and the service-providing role of the NGO sector was generally strengthened. On the other hand, parallel to these positive developments, the country's laws controlled and shaped the sector according to the demands of the state. NGOs accepted the closer cooperation offered by the state, were co-opted, and subsequently became complacent. A significant number of respondents cited this period as the point at which party politics became self-serving and NGOs were left to meet the needs of small and large communities.

Opinions regarding the third period, **from around 2001 to the present**, were more negative, especially among organizations that have been in existence for a long time. Many described the last few years as a time of "losing stability", "searching for the right path", "holding on", "apathy", "survival" and "**seven lean years**". During these years the negative effect of direct government subsidies for the sector became obvious. In-country financial resources, which have undoubtedly expanded, failed to become a driver for development. Instead, they were invested into organizations close to the state, giving the impression to many respondents that funds were actually drying up. Funding from the European Union was seen in even more negative terms, as supporting activities that are far from the original mis-

sions of NGOs and whose conditions are impossible to meet. This support has led NGOs to become bureaucratized and to abandon their aspirations to improve society, and has caused a moral, financial and administrative crisis, in some cases even insolvency.

A smaller group of respondents identified some positive developments during this period. They believed that **public opinion towards NGOs has improved,** that NGOs have succeeded in opening up to the public and have achieved certain things that have brought the positive role of NGOs to the public's attention. In their opinion, a differentiation, a subtle, qualitative change has taken place in the sector, not a general crisis.

These two points of view were colored by the opinion of those who believed that, despite the fact that every government in this third period supported the sector by initiating and financing programs, **no general or systematic change** in the relationship between NGOs and the state occurred. Although the state is now ready to accept services provided by NGOs, it regularly violates the basic rules of cooperation. Also, the state only reluctantly allows NGOs to participate in a meaningful way in any discussion of important social issues, especially if their opinion differs from the official point of view.

Relationship with the state – the roles of NGOs I (past and present)

Roles of NGOs
From the conversations it can be concluded that – **with two exceptions – every organization interviewed** had some kind of active and mutual **relationship with the state.**

When asked about their roles regarding the state, respondents gave very different descriptions. In many cases we found that what one NGO considered a role was regarded as a tool or technique by another. The roles most often mentioned were the provision of services or of expert feedback on state policies. Many people said that their role is representing and enforcing interests, lobbying and monitoring. Others said that they brought the state's attention to the importance of a certain area, provided expertise to the state, or tried to develop various activities with government financial support or simply under the state's watchful eye.

Although it is not always possible to judge the nature of the relationship from their description, it can be concluded that NGOs are happy to undertake their role

openly, and that **cooperative roles are mixed with confrontational ones.** Only a third of respondents reported having a solely cooperative role with the state, while fewer thought that their role with the state was purely confrontational. The majority said that their roles were a mixture of cooperative and confrontational, although some believed that this was due to a confusion of roles, and expressed doubts as to whether both could be realized in practice. Several respondents also mentioned that the state is reluctant to accept roles that are confrontational or that differ from 'official' opinion. Two respondents reported that the state was reluctant to cooperate with any NGO that also had a confrontational role.

Several people mentioned that they had initiated their relationship with the state on the basis of a long-term strategy, and that they either ignored issues outside this strategy, or involved themselves in such issues by supporting other organizations.

Changes in roles

When we asked about changes that have occurred in these roles, almost two-thirds of respondents reported that they had noticed a difference. Eight NGOs reported that their relationship with the state had shifted in recent years towards confrontation, while the same number reported that their relationship had become more cooperative. Some thought that their organization was taking the initiative in their relationship with the state, while others found that their relationship had become less close in the last few years.

The changes that occurred in these roles can be grouped as follows:

a) The state has changed: several respondents thought that the state appreciated their expertise and was therefore taking their opinions into consideration more often. However, several people – mainly from municipal organizations – thought that "the state has monopolized the serving of citizens" and would like to limit the role of NGOs.

b) The way NGO activities are seen has changed: some felt that the warmth of their relationship with the state changed in accordance with the importance of the topic presented by the NGO.

c) The strategy of the NGO has changed: beyond changing their strategies, five NGOs reported they are now investing more energy than before into building cooperation with other NGOs to increase their chance of success.

NGO achievements and methods in influencing decision-making processes

Achievements

NGOs seem to be effective at influencing state decisions: every organization interviewed was able to list several cases where they had achieved their goal.

Most people mentioned that they had achieved goals in connection with **preparing legislation**. In certain cases it was the *NGO that initiated* the legislative process, such as with the Law on Public Voluntary Activities, the parliamentary decree that includes a national strategy for preventing and tackling domestic violence, and legislation about the public culture in a county town, which was initiated by an NGO with an interest in the matter. Others reported that they had succeeded *during* the legislative process, which was the case with the Law on the National Civic Fund and the Law on Environmental Protection. In some cases, NGOs managed to lobby successfully for the *modification of an existing law,* such as in the case of the Penal Code, the 1% Law and the Highway Code.

"However, the legislative process is only the beginning. The main issue is **changing the way the law is enforced,"** said one of our respondents. For example, one interviewed NGO files court cases to test the extent to which the laws that have been passed are enforced in practice. Another organization noted a positive change in the behavior of the rural police force as a result of a court case, even though the case was lost.

Another big category of NGO achievements was the **formation of new government strategies, policies and plans.** These processes are most often initiated by the state, and according to our respondents provide a good opportunity to channel their ideas. This is how the National Development Plan, the National Drug Strategy and, as a member of an international coalition, the Aarhus Convention were influenced. Some organizations reported that they influenced local building regulations, or successfully changed regional developments at the local level. At the same time, some believe that policy is the sole responsibility of the state and that NGOs have no role in it.

In many cases, NGOs succeeded in influencing the state to create various **bodies, processes and forums**, which increased the importance of the ideas promoted by the NGOs and/or ensured their formal participation in the decision-making process. Such achievements include the creation of the position of a Ministry Commissioner for Cycling, the Civic Working Group that operates alongside the Disability

Committee, and the establishment of a Violence Against Women workgroup at a ministry.

Several organizations regarded it a success that **the state supported and attentively followed their innovative programs**, giving them the chance to launch and evaluate new services supported financially by the state.

In several cases the attempt to influence the state aimed to establish a **state subsidy system** in a particular area, to improve it, or to obtain new funding sources by influencing the budget or social law.

Cases in which NGOs managed to **change state plans or stop the execution of state decisions** were considered significant successes. This is how the building of the military radar base on Zengő Hill was prevented, how certain investors in Terézváros, Budapest were refused building permits, and how the privatization of protected areas was halted in the 1990s.

Methods for achieving NGO goals

Most respondents emphasized that in approaching an issue it was important to carefully gather information about the case and assess the chances of success. Only then could they be sure of getting involved with cases that were likely to succeed, because failure can damage an organization, taking up valuable time and resources, and demoralizing staff. Others believe that lost cases can also have positive effects.

Almost every respondent uses a wide range[3] of techniques to build and maintain their relationships in order to influence the state about issues that are important to them.

The answers can be classified into three groups: opening up channels of communication; targeting state officials; and other factors facilitating the successful influencing of the state.

A. Channels of communication

One of the ways of influencing the state in practice is through *formal or official means*. Our interviewees listed about 20 different processes, government offices

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3   The most important techniques were the following: building contacts through formal and informal personal meetings and correspondence; writing background studies and policies commissioned by the state, expert reviews of draft legislation, and expert documents; participating in expert policy meetings, public policy reviews, workgroups, committees, and ministerial policy reviews; collecting signatures from the public; issuing open letters and press releases; and demonstrating at general assemblies.

and institutions through which they achieved their goals. Several took part in processes initiated and financed by the state. Some processes and forums initiated by NGOs were successful because they were able to involve state representatives.

Informal or unofficial means are also important when influencing the state. All organizations reported having used "informal ways to influence the state" at some point. In such cases, the role of personal networks was very important. As one of our interviewees explained, "everything depends on the individual." In addition, their network of contacts was also mentioned by several NGOs as important when putting pressure on the state. There is "an elite" that can get through to political parties and those with decision-making responsibilities far more easily than the average NGO. Some believe that it is important for NGO members to be embedded in the elite and from there to mobilize state support for issues that are important to the NGO.

Based on our interviews, the majority of NGOs have used both formal and informal means either at the same time or alternately.

The third way was through *legal channels*. When NGOs used *legal* tools to promote their opinions, some initiated court cases if they believed that the topic required litigation, while others turned to state institutions (such as the Constitutional Court, the Parliamentary Commissioner, the Public Administrative Office, etc).

Finally, certain organizations influence the state *indirectly* through their members, target groups or society at large. They teach people how to exercise their civil rights and how to represent themselves in court. They also inspire and enable their members or target group to organize themselves. By giving lectures and creating opportunities to make connections and to network, they invigorate public life and encourage people to express and voice their opinions.

B. Targeting state officials
Most NGOs communicate with people and bodies involved in preparing decisions as well as with decision-makers. A minority of respondents reported that they focused either on decision-preparation or decision-making roles. It also depends on where and with whom the organization succeeded in building relations.

Communicating with the two target groups, those that prepare and those that make decisions, may happen simultaneously or alternately. For example, the communication may start with influencing the decision makers in order to establish the right "political intention". During the decision preparation period, the focus shifts towards the state apparatus. And just before the final decision, NGOs focus

again on elected representatives to propose amendments, influence their speeches, and effect change through the voting system.

C. Other factors facilitating the successful influencing of the state
Respondents identified several other factors that were regarded as indispensable to influencing the state. The most important were:
- The organization's **credibility and professional competence** were consistently mentioned. These arose from the NGO's previous work and achievements, the professional reputation of the experts working in the organization or cooperating with it, and their knowledge of international literature on the topic.
- Many have **taken advantage of external factors and changes in context**. These include the positive social perception of the issue presented by the NGO or when certain individuals take up key positions.
- Some said they could only achieve results by **cooperating with** others, and that it was possible to influence the state through partnerships, networks and alliances of NGOs. This requires working closely with other NGOs to convince them of the importance of the issue in question. Some NGOs joined forces on specific issues and others on a regional basis. There was also an instance of local and national organizations working together on a local issue.
- **Effective and conscious use of the media**. Many respondents mentioned that NGOs that enjoyed a regular media presence and a progressive image had a greater influence on the state. That is why many NGOs plan to develop a strong public image through the media. They build good relations with the press, expect their colleagues to appear in the media, publish their work on a regular basis, carry out publicity stunts, and employ professionals.
- Using **international relations and experience**. NGOs have used this technique in many cases to legitimize their points of view and put professional and moral pressure on the state. Several organizations believe that it is easier to bring about changes in Hungary through the EU.
- **Cross-sector cooperation.** One organization highlighted the fact that they did not build relationships only with other NGOs but also with those in the business sector who were supportive of their ideas.

Effects on NGOs
Almost all respondents reported that their success in influencing the state had a **positive effect on their public image**, bringing them increased popularity and an improved professional reputation. Five respondents mentioned that it also

contributed to the growth of the organization, which received more support, was able to employ more people, and attracted more volunteers than before. One person emphasized that success and publicity were mutually reinforcing and enhanced the entire sector's ability to promote its interests.

Many believe that it was due to their achievements that NGOs **received more media attention.** As a result, they now work more closely with the media. Some NGOs, however, are more cautious and prefer to remain out of the limelight.

One respondent highlighted a **negative effect** of their success in influencing the state, saying that it made the NGO a target of envy because it had attracted funding, the dream of many organizations in the field. Other successful organizations drew criticism from the NGO community for moving too close to the state in order to achieve their goals.

Due to their success, **conflict arose around some NGOs regarding their missions, approaches and expectations**. For example, one felt that the sector was putting pressure on it to lobby for sector interests, which did not fit with its mission; another felt that its stakeholders expected it to appear more radical towards the local government because they would be more popular and attract more publicity if they assumed a confrontational role.

According to some people, the success of NGOs should not be tied to the state. One of the organizations interviewed believe that people judge the quality of the services they get, not who provided them or how it was achieved. One respondent asserted that NGOs should build their prestige by doing interesting and valuable work, not by directly influencing the state.

It became obvious from the conversations that a successful process wins the trust of the state and makes it more likely that its relationship with an NGO will continue. Several believed that this trust was how they had managed to penetrate "the inner circle" of the state, and later to build contacts on a personal level. After that, the relationship developed into one where communication was regular, and where they were informed of government plans and were asked for their opinion on various topics. On the other hand, others reported that the state often had a predetermined idea of NGOs as nit-picking and merely out for money.

Relationship with the state – the roles of NGOs II (future):

Ideal roles for NGOs

When asked what they imagined as the ideal role for NGOs versus the state, respondents' answers fell into four main categories:

1) **Professional and expert**. NGOs set an example, provide the state with useful and tangible results, offer their expertise and innovations, and introduce new trends and ideas from abroad.

2) **Cooperative partner**. This role is viewed as essential if NGOs are to develop in the long run. According to the respondents, a cooperative partnership with the state can only exist if there is mutual respect for the boundaries and differing roles of the two sectors. For example, one NGO said that it wanted moral support and appreciation in exchange for improving local government services with the help of volunteers. Others imagined cooperation as a regulated, consortium-like system.

3) **Active participant.** NGOs voice their views on issues that concern them, influence the formation of regulations, and review draft legislation via official channels. In addition, this role enables NGOs to come up with and initiate review processes on policies and legislative proposals.

4) **Interest representation, critical and monitoring role.** This role involves influencing, convincing and monitoring state individuals and committees. Of the four roles, it is here where the likelihood of confrontation with the state is the greatest.

One in five NGOs interviewed **intends to continue with the role** they have taken on in their relationship with the state. They believe that they have managed to maintain an ideal distance from the state, or that their current service-provision role works well.

Several people agreed that at the sectoral level, the **interest representation**, **critical and monitoring role** of NGOs should be **enhanced**. In an ideal situation, interests would be represented in an organized and firm manner through formal cooperation between NGOs. One organization emphasized the importance of representing the general interests of the civic sector so its voice can be clearly heard.

At the same time, several mentioned that at the organizational level they would like to **avoid open confrontation** with the state: in an ideal situation, there

would be no confrontation since "fighting is unpopular both with us and with them". They would like the relationship between NGOs and the state to consist of well-regulated dialogue and transparent procedures, where opposing views have their place and are appreciated. One approach **emphasized continuity in the relationship,** meaning that it should not be "like a fire-extinguisher in an emergency situation" but should include continuous contact with the main representatives on all issues, not just current ones. Willingness to cooperate does not mean an avoidance of confrontation, but rather a foundation that both sides can fall back on.

One NGO thought that "it would be a good thing to leave the state out of the story entirely", and that **NGOs should remain independent of the state** as far as possible. This opinion was not a solitary one**:** "There is no need to have a relationship (with the local government) on those issues for which we established our organization", said another respondent.

Obstacles

When we asked about the factors that inhibit the development of ideal roles, several people mentioned a general regressive (not progressive) atmosphere in Hungary, which is marked by distrust, a decrease in activism in general and an ignorance of community issues.

Many identified **the way the state operates as the main obstacle**. The fact that the state has no clear ideas of development in the NGO field means that it is impossible to follow state procedures, as they are not transparent and there is a general aversion to change in the state apparatus.

Others identified the current form of **the relationship between the state and NGOs** as problematic, and said that both the state and NGOs were contributing to this. Most people mentioned the absence of an established framework for negotiation and dialogue. If NGOs are continually forced to adapt to the regularly changing structures of the state, it makes it very difficult to maintain substantive relations. This is further complicated by the fact that NGOs usually lack resources for maintaining relationships and cooperation.

When talking about the internal obstacles within **organizations** that prevent them from playing an ideal role, several people mentioned that they have no time to deal with the NGO's strategy because **they are overwhelmed by daily operations**. NGOs often have to choose between activities consistent with their mission but for which there is insufficient funding, and non-core projects for which funds are available. These difficulties manifest themselves in the everyday work of NGOs

in a shortage of time and money for 'important issues' and a lack of appropriate preparation and expertise.

Others believed that the most important obstacles are the **general workload,** fatigue and continual financial **instability** common to NGOs.

A smaller group of respondents found the tasks that arose from **the rapid growth of their NGOs** to be challenging, including how to recruit suitable people or find volunteers, how to help them fit in with the culture of the organization, and how to ensure that the growing organization continues to follow its mission and does not become complacent.

Expected changes

Based on the replies, the majority of interviewees **do not expect major changes in the relationship between NGOs and the state,** while some are quite pessimistic on the matter. The reason given by one respondent is that the state rejects every initiative proposed by NGOs because it does not want to incur extra expenses. Previously it was possible to talk about "reality", but these days the state only cares about its public image and propaganda. According to another view, due to the nature of the state's grip on power, no change will take place unless external forces are brought to bear.

Instead of the 'possible changes' which the question referred to, respondents preferred to talk about the needs they expected the state to meet:

a) Most organizations stressed the **need for a general process of democratization**. Representative democracy should work in a real way; the public should be able to trust their representatives; decisions should be made by legitimate bodies that have been legitimately elected; in other words "let democracy be more fashionable!"

b) It would be a positive change if **the state stopped eroding existing services,** and instead maintained the number of services that it is responsible for and financed them adequately.

c) A smaller group of respondents called for **new or changed regulations**. Some believe that legislation should be introduced to regulate the state's approach to NGOs and the way in which NGOs' opinions are taken into account. One suggested that the transparency of the non-profit sector should be regulated to allow for the different requirements of large and small NGOs, and that the Aarhus Convention should be expanded by adding sanctions to it.

d) Among the organizations interviewed there was a unanimous call for more predictability in their operations (not just financial predictabili-

ty), since only NGOs whose existence is relatively secure are able to take part in preparing decisions and influence the state successfully.

In terms of future opportunities, one group of organizations explicitly said they hoped that the **cooperation developed in recent years between NGOs will strengthen** and will bring about more successes in putting pressure on the state. They anticipated that this could be achieved either by learning about how cooperation works in other places, or by connecting different groups of NGOs in new ways.

Some of the NGOs interviewed believe that another way they could improve is to open up to society more, since popular movements behind NGOs can make their work more legitimate in the eyes of the state and emphasize the issues presented by NGOs in the decision-preparation process.

"We are not at the end of the story yet." Only one organization said **explicitly** that it **expects changes.** Although the state uses NGOs effectively for its own purposes, it does not listen to their ideas and concerns. This will only change when the sector becomes strong enough to compel the state to pay attention.

Comments, questions and recommendations

The answers to our questions painted a diverse and contradictory picture of the relationship between NGOs and the state. All organizations reported successes in their dealings with the state, but every opinion expressed was contradicted in some way by one or more people. We therefore believe that the interviewees' answers reflect the wide range of perspectives, experiences and ideas that currently exist in the sector

Looking at the answers from a broader perspective, they reflect to some degree the summary statement in the recently published Civil Annual Report 2006-2007: "an examination of the state-civil organization relationship points to decreasing cooperation and increasing conflicts …"[4]. **Our findings show that whether NGOs cooperate with the state or find themselves in conflict with it, they desire a formal, transparent and meaningful relationship with the state.** This confirms that there is support for efforts like the Nonprofit Information and Training Centre Foundation's TEEN Program, which aims to develop a set of norms for public consultation processes[5].

While we agree with much of the criticism of the state expressed in the interviews, we also feel that NGOs could do a lot to change the current nature of their relationship with the state. **It is vitally important for NGOs,** individually and together, **to reflect on their relationship with the state, to re-think their roles based on the outcome of this reflection, and to develop strategies accordingly. We recommend that NGOs take time out of their daily work and create room for such reflection.**

Although NGOs themselves bear the main responsibility for improving their work through reflection, other actors can also play an important supporting role. **Above all, donor practices must be reviewed to help grantees find the right balance between 'doing' and 'reflecting', while specific support must be provided for reflection within the framework of 'normal' grants**.

With this in mind, we move on to analyze four topics that we identified as closest to the focus of this research and most relevant in the Hungarian context. We also posed some questions that should be reflected on. Finally, we identified two phenomena that emerged from the interviews as possible resources for the future.

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4   Anna Mária Bartal, "When Utopia's Oases Dry Out", in: Civil Annual Report 2006-2007. http://portal.civilszemle.hu/downloads/Civil_Szemle_14-15.pdf

5   A description of the program can be found at http://www.osszefogas.nonprofit.hu/rovat/29.html?archivum=

A. Identity traits of NGOs

The situation and the work of the NGOs interviewed produced a contradictory picture. Overall, the NGOs regard their own achievements and those of the sector as signs of success, and feel that **their influence on the state is slowly growing.** This improves their ability to promote the public good and pursue social goals, the two main characteristics of NGOs.

However, most respondents did not conceal their **negative view of the situation in the sector (and often specifically their own situation)**. They believe that the NGO sector is exhausted and has been exploited. Several NGOs are facing major financial difficulties because the funding available is inadequate for them to undertake the tasks they regard as important. This is especially the case in terms of the quality of resources.

According to a more extreme opinion, the sector has lost its way and has failed to answer important questions about its relationship with the state: **what kind of 'distance' should the sector keep from the state in order to safeguard its independence?** What can it expect from the state in terms of financing and involvement in decision-making? To what extent can the sector expect that these ideas will be shared by the state, and to what extent should it push them? The search for answers is both enhanced and hampered by the **sector's diversity and blurred boundaries**: there are plenty of individual answers available, but it is not obvious what they have in common.

It is important to consider where and how NGOs draw strength and inspiration in their search for answers when their daily life is often a struggle for survival. To what extent does re-thinking the most important characteristics of the sector (being useful to the public and independent from the state, and undertaking self-organized activity) help work at the organizational level? To what extent is it possible to search for these answers together in a sector which is diverse but whose self-declared identity derives from a sense of community?

B. NGOs' involvement in politics and with political parties

The topic of NGO involvement in politics and with political parties regularly arose in our conversations. It is a problematic issue that has complex implications for the relationship between NGOs and the state.

Opinions about **whether NGOs should be involved in politics** varied. Some people totally rejected the idea. Others admitted that their work had political aspects, particularly as the original meaning of the word 'politics' (public life) implies that everybody who takes part in public life is involved in politics. In their opinion, NGOs take part in public life by definition.

There was unanimous agreement that NGOs and their activities **must be clearly distinguished from political parties.** This becomes a problem in practice when an NGO appears to be dealing with issues that are dominated by political parties, and yet **would like to maintain and project its independent character and identity**. There is a rational explanation for this as well: openly siding with a political party usually hurts the credibility of an NGO, as well as its public reputation, morale, and image within the sector. None of the NGOs interviewed would risk so much in trying to influence the state.

Forming and maintaining appropriate relationships with political parties is a major challenge for many organizations. Several seemingly effective solutions were mentioned as to **how NGOs could continue to appear 'civic'** in public **but maintain contact with political parties** at the same time:

- -- Several organizations mentioned that they maintain relationships and negotiate with all major political parties. As a result, they are seen as independent.
- -- One respondent mentioned that given the nature of their work, they are always seen as close to whichever party is in opposition. When a new government is elected, the 'classification' of the organization changes and an independent image starts to build.
- -- One respondent reported that the people working in his organization openly discuss their opposing political views, which makes it difficult to identify the organization with any single political party.
- -- Some reported that NGOs which are close to politics tend to work in coalitions in which every political party or view is represented. Proposals prepared in such a way find it much easier to get passed than those prepared by NGOs that are close to just one political party.

The question is whether NGOs will be inspired by the positive examples set by others in the sector. How can an NGO act as an independent player and offset the dominance of political parties at the same time? Could NGOs, through the way they work, contribute to the process of democratization that is desired by many of the NGOs interviewed, and decrease the negative preconceptions that are associated with politics due to the behavior of political parties?

C. NGOs' perception of the state

A general view of the state emerged from the answers to our questions. **The experience** of NGOs **in practice indicates that the state is not homogenous;** the way parts of it (and sometimes individuals themselves) think and operate shows significant differences. Nonetheless, NGOs have difficulty incorporating this complexity into their views of *the state*.

The way *the state* is perceived appears to be very negative at the moment: the organizations interviewed **believe that the way the state operates shows a general lack of strategic thinking, expertise, predictability and transparency**. In certain areas, when it comes to professional expertise, dedication, serving the common good, recognizing problems, and responding quickly and dynamically, *NGOs consider the state as the opposite of the ideal image they set for themselves.*

At the same time, NGOs admitted they have serious shortcomings themselves, including a lack of strategy and transparency, an over-reliance on personal contacts, inefficiency at the institutional level, a hastiness in their approach, and an erosion in their social support,

Despite the negative public image of the state, most NGOs interviewed would like to have a relationship with the state because **the state offers many important opportunities for achieving their goals**. In fact, certain things can only be provided by the state, such as creating, modifying and enforcing legislation important to NGOs, regulating and providing financial support for services developed by NGOs in the state system, providing official (government) recognition of the work of NGOs, and increasing the influence of NGOs by offering further cooperation.

NGOs should reflect on several questions to improve their perception of the state: What kind of relationship can be developed with a partner who is seen in such a negative and contradictory way? How can a more complex and sophisticated picture be created of the state, and how can this picture be remembered? Could NGOs change themselves, their attitudes and their work in such a way that would incline the state as a whole to take a more favorable approach to NGOs?

D. A question of choice: role and strategy in relation to the state
Every NGO is free to choose its roles and strategies, and to decide how best to influence the state. Almost any role has the potential for success.

What should NGOs bear in mind when choosing the role that is most likely to help them achieve their goals?

The following questions emerged from the interviews and may help NGOs to choose the most appropriate role(s):
- What roles naturally flow from their identity, given that the main characteristics of NGOs include serving the common good, being independent from the state, being voluntary and being community-based?

How do these characteristics feature in the organization's history, values and ways of thinking?

- What should the ideal state look like, and how NGOs currently see *the state*? What do they think about that part of the state they are either in contact with or about to make contact with?
- What are the potential consequences of the various roles for the NGO?
- What channels of communication are available to influence the state?
- What is the potential for cooperation with other NGOs (and players outside the sector) on the given issue?
- What other factors could help influence the state more effectively? How credible are they? How prepared are they professionally regarding the topic? How can they make use of external processes? How effectively are they using the media? What kind of international relations and experience can they draw on?

E. Resources for the future

Two areas emerged from the interviews that we believe could serve as resources for the whole sector to improve its relationship with the state and contribute to the democratization process that has been mentioned by many.

One is **cooperation among NGOs.** Considering previous experiences of such joint efforts, some NGOs were very positive about cooperation on a *voluntary* basis. This would allow NGOs to represent their opinions and interests effectively, as the different experiences, networks, backgrounds and fields of interests of the cooperating NGOs would reinforce each other and lead to successes they could not have achieved on their own.

We believe that besides achieving goals effectively, cooperation between NGOs provides an excellent opportunity for a deep exchange of experience and knowledge towards developing a suitable role and strategy versus the state. Joint work also provides an opportunity to gain greater experience in carrying out transparent and jointly-planned processes. NGOs learn to trust each other and the process itself, to respect each other's different opinions, and to search for compromises – all of which demonstrate the democratic nature of their operations.

The other positive tendency we found is the readiness, mentioned by several respondents, to **deal with issues between NGOs and the state via regulated 'formal' processes. This offers transparent and effective channels**, in which everybody who wants to participate gets an opportunity to do so. This approach would contribute to the democratization of the relationship between NGOs and the

state. NGOs could set an example with their own work that would then put pressure on the state to move in the same direction.

The reason we believe that this is important is because people in Hungary tend not to believe that official procedures work, and as a result often resort to individual, 'informal' ways of dealing with their problems. The behavior of NGOs is consistent with this approach (those interviewed use such 'informal' contacts in their daily work themselves.) By using informal channels, NGOs help to weaken the transparency of the processes that are slowly being created, and thus reduce their credibility. This not only makes life more difficult for those who are trying to democratize these processes, but it also reinforces the distrust of formal processes among those NGOs whose position, connections and resources are insufficient to build and maintain influential informal contacts.

Poland

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the development of the third sector and the influence that NGOs have exerted on decision-making processes in Poland. The study is based on answers to unified questionnaires. About 30 interviews were conducted with representatives of key NGOs. The list of respondents is public (see the list of interviewees), although some of the opinions cited in this report are anonymous.

The material we collected allowed us to prepare a series of reports providing conclusions, proposals for change, and strategies to be adopted by NGOs to help them better support socio-economic development. The recommendations included in the report were made after an analysis of the interviews and on the basis of the conclusions drawn during the meeting of experts, when the preliminary results of the research were discussed.

Analysis of the research
The information collected in the interviews covered the following topics:

- **the general context**, including the various definitions of 'non-governmental organization', and the factors and events that had a significant impact on NGOs in Poland after 1989;
- **the roles of non-governmental organizations**, including the roles played by NGOs towards the state, the central government, and lower governments (the actual state), as well as the changes they have undergone over the past 18 years; the roles that NGOs should play (the ideal state); and the roles NGOs could play given the current socio-legal factors (with reference to the actual state of affairs);
- **the influence exerted on decision-making processes**, including the methods and mechanisms used by NGOs to exert this influence, examples of success and failure, and instances of NGO participation in social consultations;
- **the prospects for inter-sectoral relations**, including those social and legal changes recommended by respondents as likely to improve relations between NGOs and the public administration, as well as any factors inhibiting inter-sectoral relations and the roles of NGOs.

Methodology
The research was conducted on the basis of a qualitative analysis. As research of this type comprises only a small sample of respondents, its findings are not repre-

sentative of a wider population and cannot serve as a basis for statistical conclusions.[6] In order to collect the research material, the researchers used individual in-depth interviews, consisting of a thorough and detailed conversation with a respondent. An in-depth interview has its own agenda of topics that are tackled successively during the conversation. The questions are open-ended, and their order and the way they are formulated depends exclusively on the interviewer. The interview is recorded and the information collected is later presented in the form of a descriptive report[7]. The research helped identify and describe certain structures of statements and the relations governing the latter, meaning that a state of theoretical saturation was achieved[8].

Use of the research

In Poland, the research was conducted in November and December 2007. The 30 interviews were carried out with representatives of the third sector nationwide. The sample selection was deliberate. The research included representatives of organizations dealing with various fields such as social welfare, ecology, education, culture, sport, and rural development. Equally important were interviews with representatives of infrastructure organizations whose aim is to create a 'base' for the third sector and reinforce it. Two interviews were conducted with representatives of church charities. The research was received favorably by the respondents. Only one person refused to be interviewed. A preliminary research report was prepared in January 2008. The recommendations were formulated on the grounds of a meeting of experts organized in February 2008 by the Institute for Public Affairs, during which the preliminary results of the research were discussed.

The research team

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6   M. Hammersley, P. Atkinson: *Field Research Methods (Metody badań terenowych)*, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2000, pp. 213–214.

7   K. Lutyńska: *Questionnaire Interview: Development and Checking of Research Tool*, (Wywiad kwestionariuszowy. Przygotowanie i sprawdzenie narzędzia badawczego), Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1984, pp. 13–33.

8   K. Konecki: *Methodology of Qualitative Methods: Established Theory*, (Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2000, p. 86.

The general context

In attempting to explain the term 'non-governmental organization', the respondents referred to **a horizontal division: registered organizations such as charities and foundations versus informal civic or social associations.** Only six respondents mentioned that an NGO has the status of a legal entity and a formal structure. More frequently, respondents referred to spontaneous, bottom-up initiatives undertaken by citizens, and pointed to voluntary forms of associations that help achieve common goals that are important for a given group. As one remarked: *"this is a concentration of energy generated by those who care."*

The respondents often described a non-governmental organization as a structure, an institution, or an informal group that has clear goals, a mission, and a vision of what it aims to attain. They also emphasized that the people who form NGOs are focused on the achievement of joint goals. The respondents frequently mentioned the typology of the three sectors: public, business, and non-governmental administration.

"An NGO is an organization which operates outside the government, it is not financed by the government, and it is not subject to any government policy. Instead, it has its own policy, not politics, and it has an idea of what should be done in a given field, irrespective of what the current government's policy is."

"An NGO is dependent on neither public nor business administration."

On the other hand, the respondents emphasized the dependence of NGOs on the public administration when it came to financing or performing tasks delegated by public administration: *"We depend totally on the government because our activities cover those fields where the government either performs poorly or not at all, or is going in the wrong direction. We often act through the government because many of our goals cannot be achieved if the central government or a lower government is not involved."* One responded observed that proposing alternative solutions that contradict the standpoint of the decision-makers can lead to an NGO being denied access to public funds. However, NGOs that take the soft approach find that it is ineffective, because the government fails to take them seriously.

When asked to name the events and factors that had the greatest impact on NGOs in Poland after 1989, respondents pointed to social or historical events such as the organization of the National Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations (it was held four times), the creation of the Forum of Non-Governmental Initiatives, and the availability of pre-accession EU funds. They also highlighted certain legal documents, such as the law on associations from 1989, the law on public benefit and volunteer work from 2003, and the Constitution of 1997. Five respondents pointed

to initiatives undertaken by Jerzy Hausner when he was running the advisory body to the deputy prime minister and the minister of finance. During this period, the first attempt was made to formulate a law regulating relations between NGOs and the public administration (1996). Other important initiatives came from the time when Hausner was minister of labor and social policy (October 2001 to January 2003) and then deputy prime minister and minister of economy, labor and social policy (January 2003 to March 2005). Three respondents mentioned the appointment of Zbigniew Woźniak as the prime minister's plenipotentiary for non-governmental organizations in 1998. Even though he resigned after only 18 months, the respondents said he managed to create a friendly atmosphere fostering the institutionalization of the social dialogue at the national level.

Some 16 respondents regarded the adoption of the law on public benefit and volunteer work of 2003 as of paramount importance for the third sector in Poland. One also observed that, considering Poland's accession to the European Union the following year, the law had been passed at the very last moment: *"If it had come into force three or four years earlier, NGOs would have had more opportunities to adjust to the new conditions."* Another respondent said that, taking into account the needs of NGOs and the development of inter-sectoral relations, the law had been adopted too late. Still another thought that the law only complicated matters and divided NGOs into better ones – those with the status of a public benefit organization – and worse ones, those that lack such a status. Complications arose from the fact that the public debate on the law had failed to decide whether the public benefit status was to be a privilege reserved for the few, or a standard available to everyone. The failure to resolve this issue has led to NGOs with the status of public benefit organizations being stigmatized.

Nearly half of all respondents (13 people) said that 1989 had been a giant step in Polish history, given the political and socio-economic transformation that had subsequently taken place, and the adoption of the law on associations. They reminisced that at the time they had believed they lived in a free country where they were able to decide their own futures.

Ten of those interviewed considered Poland's integration into the European Union to be a key event that furthered the development of the NGO sector. They emphasized that accession meant that EU funds became available and that EU standards and practices had to be adopted. Six respondents mentioned the availability of PHARE program pre-accession funds, as a result of which the first major tasks were assigned to NGOs. Two respondents said it was impossible to single out any specific events as milestones, as the development of the third sector was a dynamic process.

The above analysis shows that the respondents have a rather idealized notion of the third sector as created by people united by common goals and missions. The fact that NGOs have the status of legal entities was seen as of minor importance. Two things were interesting in their answers: first, their analyses of key events in the development of NGOs in Poland was quite superficial; and second, respondents referred almost exclusively to facts that are widely known even to the average volunteer worker.

NGO roles

The respondents' opinions show that over the last few years, the public administration has begun to appreciate NGO initiatives. According to those interviewed, this change was due largely to the professionalization of the third sector, improving the quality and effectiveness of inter-sectoral cooperation:

"Our cooperation with the government was worse at the beginning than in the later period. At present, we are focused on cooperation with self-governments, or rather on supporting them. It's hard to say to what extent this is due to our internal transformation, or to the fact that self-governments are now more open to cooperation."

"Some NGOs have gained self-confidence in criticizing the government or in insisting that they be allowed to participate in decision-making processes."

However, the respondents emphasized that NGOs are still not treated as equal partners by public administration: *"It is clear that the public administration has come to realize the benefits of cooperation and is taking advantage of them, but this is just because it appears useful, not because it is of a great value in itself."*

The study enabled the researchers to draw up a typology of the roles played by NGOs in relation to the state. Most often (26 people), the respondents mentioned **the role of a provider of social services**, which is like a contractor as it consists of performing tasks delegated by the public administration for direct beneficiaries. Those interviewed also used such terms as a servant role, a task role, and the role of a provider of services for people. Our analysis of the respondents' views shows there are two mechanisms at work here. On the one hand, the public administration willingly gives ground to NGOs by tasking them with jobs that are either inconvenient or simply better performed by NGOs than by public institutions. On the other hand, NGOs take over tasks wherever the state fails to take the initiative or performs poorly.

"It seems to me that the role of NGOs is to perform thankless tasks, which for some reason the public administration finds inconvenient or impossible. On the one hand, tedious tasks are being shifted to NGOs, while on the other it works like a fig leaf. If there is an initiative, public administration can support it on the basis of 'bread and circuses'. This helps everyone, it supports everyone."

The respondents also pointed to **the spokesman's role** played by NGOs (22 people), i.e. representing the interests of specific social groups: *"Their role as a spokesman means that NGOs transmit social needs to self-governments and advise on what course of action should be taken."*

What is more, this role envisages that initiatives that are taken on will be organized and concentrated by creating various federations and umbrella organizations, which in turn leads to the development of lobbying mechanisms: *"NGOs have started to create their own federations, which has made them better at channeling their efforts at a single joint initiative."*

Another NGO role underlined by the respondents was **the monitoring of public administration activities** (20 people), a task that is performed by watchdog organizations. The respondents emphasized that these organizations are a key factor in civic control; it is also clear that their monitoring of various aspects of public life can conflict with the interests of the authorities. Public institutions are loath to have a spotlight trained on their unclear methods, ambiguous mechanisms, and many mistakes. The importance of monitoring is greatest in the environmental, human rights, legislation, and health care sectors.
"Organizations have emerged that have started to monitor the activities of the public administration at both the national and local levels. The first to do so were environmental organizations; it's an inherent part of their mission, the way they act. But in time other NGOs grew up as well, especially to monitor the corruption that results from the proximity between business and politics."

Seventeen respondents highlighted **the expert (innovative) role** of NGOs, which is performed by think-tanks, i.e. independent centers conducting research and analyses on public issues. Think-tanks seek solutions to social problems and participate in public debates. In their role of expert organizations they also provide the public administration with independent information and plausible solutions based on their deep knowledge:
"At present, the expert role is the busiest, because NGOs are providing more and more specialized services for the public administration by preparing expert reports and organizing workshops, which are growing in number."

According to the respondents, **two factors determine which role a given organization will play – the field in which the NGO operates, and the scope of its activities. Its financing** is also of considerable importance. NGOs that play expert and monitoring roles are most often large national institutions focused on the environment, human rights, legislation, and health care. One respondent noted that:
"Monitoring is something that NGOs are engaging in with increasing courage. They

are no longer afraid to do it, but at the local level it does not work so well, because in small communities people know each other. Given that watchdog activities involve making enquiries and checking to see if everything is OK, that can create conflicts. In Slovakia it is regarded as unnatural for someone to supervise somebody else's work, especially in the public sector." In the case of watchdog organizations, it is only natural that they are not financed from public funds. However, the case of expert organizations is more complicated, as think-tanks provide invaluable knowledge for the public administration, and the latter might be more than willing to co-finance their projects. On the other hand, this money may come at the expense of objectivity and independence.

According to the respondents, organizations providing social services are usually small institutions operating at the local level; given the nature of their tasks, these NGOs are the closest to their beneficiaries. The majority of these organizations cooperate with, and are financed by, local governments, and are involved with social welfare, education, and health care. Spokesman organizations, on the other hand, are more centralized and federalized, which increases their effectiveness. Spokesman organizations target specific groups of beneficiaries who are unable to assert their rights on their own. In the case of these organizations, the share of public funding is considerable.

When asked about the **roles that NGOs should play towards the state (ideal roles),** the respondents unanimously cited the **task of creating communities** in society. This role involves encouraging citizens to take up initiatives, and *"gives people the feeling that they are part of a community"*; it also builds *"a strong and organized civic society"*, and provides *"a sense of identity in small communities"*. In describing the ideal role, those interviewed often referred to a model of the ideal state, in which the subsidiarity principle was observed and public institutions saw cooperation with NGOs as a natural part of inter-sectoral relations. According to the respondents, the ideal role required the presence of spontaneous, bottom-up civic initiatives. NGOs should also perform public tasks in a variety of fields, wherever they are most needed, and not just where the public administration allows them to go. Frequently, in order to receive funding, NGOs are forced to adjust their initiatives in accordance with the vision of public institutions. As a result, the projects that are carried out are not those that NGOs consider worth implementing, but those that the public administration is willing to finance. *"Non governmental organizations should meet the needs of citizens, but not according to a model in which the state delegates tasks and NGOs perform them."* This violates the fundamental principle of the independence of civic organizations.

The question concerning the roles that NGOs could play in light of current socio-

legal factors was difficult for respondents to answer. They tended to equate this role with the desired role in the ideal state, or to stress that NGOs should keep the roles they play at present, but should be treated as an equal partner by the public administration.

The fact that the respondents pointed out roles that can be classified within a specific typology shows that the third sector in Poland has finally been consolidated. Another crucial point made and thus worth considering was the emphasis put on the role of creating communities. On the one hand, this points to the existence of unfulfilled social needs, while on the other it shows that the sector's leaders believe that civic initiatives in Poland need strengthening.

Influence exerted on decision-making processes

Only three respondents denied that NGOs had exerted some influence on decision-making processes in Poland's development. However, although the rest of those interviewed claimed that **NGOs had influence**, it turned out that this influence was not **as explicit and clear-cut** as it should be. The respondents mentioned events which proved the success of NGOs in this regard, such as the adoption of the law on public benefit and volunteer work[9], the 1% tax assignment rule[10], alterations to VAT rules[11], and the law on foundations[12]. According to 16 of the respondents, the successes of NGOs have been recognized and appreciated by the public. However, as one observed: *"I wonder if from the outside our successes and defeats are treated equally, because we are often seen by the public as yet another ministry, another department, another offshoot of the state. NGOs have won 1% of taxes, they have won another tax break; in other words, once again a group of people has gained something. In this context our success is not treated as a success for the public as a whole. One success that was seen as also benefiting people on the outside (thanks to the media coverage) was the implementation of the law on public finances.*

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9   The most frequently quoted benefits of the law on public benefit and volunteer work are: putting the subsidiarity principle into practice, the introduction of a definition of a 'non-governmental organization', a status as a legal entity for voluntary institutions, and the establishment of the Public Benefit Works Council.

10   The introduction of a possibility to donate 1% of personal income tax to support public benefit organizations.

11   Restoring the possibility to settle VAT liabilities to branches of a legal entity that is an NGO with a public benefit status.

12   The rejected government bill envisaged *int. al.* the restriction of the sponsor's discretion, the requirement to set aside funds for covering the liquidation of a foundation, and, in the case of foundations that run business activities, the requirement to administer funds of not less than PLN 20,000.

There was a lot of fuss about this in the media, and after only six months the govern- ment introduced amendments, proving [our] strength and determination. But in this case it was the media rather than the NGO sector that forced the issue."

The respondents emphasized that no institutionalized mechanism for exerting in- fluence existed: *"There are some mechanisms at work, but they are mostly informal."* They pointed to the individual connections that NGO leaders had with decision- makers, lobbying, and non-systematized activities. **According to the respond- ents, exerting influence is a matter of having a large number of useful con- nections and not of taking part in an institutionalized dialogue.**
"It seems to me that it is the NGO leaders and not the organizations themselves [that exert the most influence]. Many NGOs have strong personalities, strong leaders, and these leaders have had enormous influence on these changes over the past 18 years. NGOs are way down the list."
"It may appear that NGOs have influence, but it is really thanks to the sector's leaders. Most of all, it's the name that counts."

The respondents also emphasized that **a growing number of NGOs in Poland were acting in their own interests**, disregarding the aims and the needs of other social groups and organizations. They pointed to **a process of polarization and oligarchization in the third sector**, by which only big organizations with famous leaders are able to exert influence on decision-makers. Smaller organizations do not stand a chance, and when they do gain something, it is only *"when the 'sharks' succeed"*.

Some 23 respondents stressed **the significance of having useful contacts among MPs,** and 7 claimed that the deciding factor in exerting influence is **to have a politician in the ranks of the NGO**: *"If an NGO does not have an MP or a local councilor in its ranks, it can knock, write, or apply – all in vain."*

The respondents pointed out that attempts to institutionalize initiatives includ- ed the establishment of the Public Benefit Works Council[13] (10 people) and the Parliamentary Team for Cooperation with NGOs[14] (6 people). Over the past few

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13   The Public Benefit Works Council is an advisory body auxiliary to the minister for social affairs. Its members are appointed and dismissed by the minister. The Council was established on No- vember 27, 2003. Its term of office lasts 3 years, but the first Council that was appointed lasted 2 years.

14   The Parliamentary Team for Cooperation with NGOs was created in April 2006. Since Decem- ber 2007, its has been known as the Parliamentary Team for Civic Dialogue. The Team supports NGO activity and streamlines communication between the government and the parliament on one side, and NGOs on the other.

years, another type of NGO has gained significance, namely think-tank organizations, which disseminate expert opinions and research reports. The federalization of the third sector is also increasingly important: *"These federations of NGOs function quite well. There are already a few of them, and they are quite important. They have their say when it comes to the key issues in the sector."* As a result of these processes, social dialogue is becoming more institutionalized and depersonalized.

The majority of those interviewed **criticized the effectiveness of social consultations with the participation of NGO representatives**. They decried the arrogance of the public administration, such as in not following prior arrangements, or of informing NGOs of an opportunity to participate in consultations only after the fact: *"If inter-departmental consultations last two hours, then I ask what kind of a genius is able to become familiar with the entire piece of legislation and spot all the legislative flaws within this time. In this country, 'consultation' consists of passing on information. It has nothing to do with consultation in the normal sense. This is where we should concentrate our efforts."* The respondents claimed that the participation of NGOs in the process of social consultation was a sham: *"In general, the public administration has its own vision and wants nothing to do with constructive criticism or modifications to its programs."*

According to the respondents, this parody of social consultation has led to resignation among NGOs and a distrust in the opportunities that exist in consultations. Enormous efforts have been made, huge amounts of time invested, and they have not been rewarded with concrete results. As one respondent said: *"Many people have negative feelings about social consultations with the participation of NGOs because their expectations were too high. If NGOs expect their opinions to be taken into consideration during social consultations, then they will be disappointed. After all, those who make the decisions gather different views and opinions, and then have to decide whether to change the original plan or not."*

The above analysis points to the lack of institutionalized forms of civic dialogue in Poland. Even if over the past few years attempts have been made to implement such a dialogue, the third sector's leaders still believe that only individual contacts and informal lobbying can bring results. According to the respondents, the sham of social consultations only confirms this view. Our analysis of the material shows that the sector's leaders have failed to grasp the true meaning of the consultation process, and wrongly assume that their opinions should always be taken into account.

Prospects for inter-sectoral relations

Among the factors inhibiting inter-sectoral relations, the respondents mentioned the following: **a lack of confidence on the part of the public administration in NGOs** *("We don't understand each other. It has never been stated explicitly what these organizations are for.");* **the centralization and bureaucratization of initiatives; and the fear of giving ground.** According to those interviewed, Bureaucrats still cannot get used to the idea that NGOs often perform tasks better, cheaper, and more effectively than state institutions. Bureaucrats have an unfounded fear that they could lose their jobs to volunteer workers. The respondents also emphasized the fact that there is no culture of inter-sectoral cooperation: *"In Poland, the public administration is a fortress that cannot be penetrated. In truth, they don't really need us. They know they should act differently, that we are in the EU now and in the EU the state and NGOs work together, but they haven't yet got the habit."*

All respondents stressed that **the lack of funding for current initiatives and the difficulty of maintaining continuity in funding** are the most urgent problems facing NGOs in Poland. They also pointed to **personnel problems** – specialists are leaving the sector because of the low earnings and the uncertain career prospects. For many people, NGOs serve only as a bridge to a later professional career. One respondent observed: *"My staff are educated, qualified, and well-prepared. We do a good job, and I have secured funding until the end of March next year. After that, I don't know what will happen to us, and my staff doesn't know either. I could come to the office on April 1 and shut down the agency, and it will not be an April Fools' Day joke, because I will have run out of funding. There is no continuity in funding."*

According to eight respondents, NGOs are hurt by the fact that work in the third sector is still perceived as a low-paying job. The truth of this is clear from the financing of projects, where the terms are dictated by donors who allocate funds for the performance of a given task, not to pay the salaries of the researchers. On the other hand, the respondents also emphasized that for many people, the third sector is their employer, and the myth of a non-paying jobs should have been dispelled long ago. One respondent said that *"NGOs should know their own worth"* and charge adequate rates for their work.

Another difficulty is posed by **overly complex legal procedures**, such as the lengthy NGO registration process and complex book-keeping. According to those interviewed, many regulations require simplification, including the law on public benefit and volunteer work.
"It should be made easier for small organizations to start up. Their people have no time for red tape, complicated procedures, reading the law, or book-keeping. They just

want to get involved. Another law that needs simplification is the one regulating the registration of associations. Registration in the National Court Register takes three months, and that's too long for a hobby organization."

The irony is that the availability of EU structural funds actually threatens NGOs in Poland, a fact that was emphasized by seven respondents. NGOs that make use of EU funds are perceived as *'grant-devourers'*, turning over time into *'quasi-administrative structures'*. One respondent observed that *"EU money has a pathological effect on a huge scale."*

The respondents also said that **in Polish society there is no natural willingness to associate and cooperate to achieve a common goal**[15]. As many as 26 of those interviewed said that civic initiative in Poland requires strengthening and that the third sector needs to raise civic awareness and create an image and identity for itself in order to become strong and consolidated: *"This is the result of serious neglect by successive governments after 1989; they failed to take measures to encourage social and civic initiatives."*

The above analysis shows that inter-sectoral relations are hampered by a number of complex issues that need to be addressed by both the public administration and NGOs. The most startling result of the research is the stagnation seen in the absence of pro-social attitudes and the unwillingness to associate.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research produced interesting insight into the self-image of people who have been closely engaged with the third sector for years. On the one hand, these people have an idealistic view of the third sector as one created by people united by common goals and missions, and not as a formalized structure with the status of a legal entity. The fact that none of the respondents referred to the definition in the law on public benefit and volunteer work[16] was telling. Although the past few

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15   According to the research, which was conducted in 2004 by the Social Opinion Research Center, more than one in two Poles (56%) admitted that people should be sensitive and help others, while over one in three (35%) claimed that people should look after their own business and disregard others. Over the last two years, the ratio of people professing pro-social values has dropped by 5 percentage points. (*Czy Polacy są społecznikami? Komunikat z badań*, CBOS, Warszawa luty 2004, www.cbos.pl)

16   The law says that non-governmental organizations are non-profit legal entities, not units of the public finance sector (in view of the regulations on public finance), and organizations not having a legal entity status created on the grounds of the law, including foundations and associations.

years have seen an increasing tendency to create legal frameworks for NGOs in Poland, the sector's leaders cling to their definition of spontaneous, bottom-up and informal civic initiatives.

On the other hand, the third sector has become alienated from the environment it grew up in – civic society. The research reveals a certain weakness in the self-image of NGO leaders. When asked to name the events that had the greatest impact on NGOs in Poland, the leaders cited widely known facts such as the political transformation, the adoption of the law on public benefit and volunteer work, and Poland's accession to the European Union. Only two attempted a deeper analysis of historical events or mentioned the first attempts to institutionalize civic initiative in Poland in the early 1990*s*, when the National Council of Non-Governmental Organizations and the Polish Foundations Forum were created. They also pointed to the July 1997 floods and the consequences for Polish NGOs. First, the crisis tested the capabilities of many civic initiatives, and second, it gobbled up funding that had been allocated for the infrastructure of the newly emerging sector. The unexpected claim of flood victims on these funds led to financial problems at many NGOs.

The respondents identified several roles played by NGOs – that of a provider of social services (contractor), that of a spokesman, of monitoring the activities of the public administration, and the expert role. The respondents arrived at two telling conclusions regarding inter-sectoral relations and the roles played by NGOs. First, according to the sector's leaders, NGOs are not treated as an equal partner by the public administration. Second, in order to obtain funding for research, NGOs adjust their initiatives to the visions imposed by public institutions. This violates their independence, which is fundamental to the third sector. The most important role that should be played by NGOs is **creating communities in society** by encouraging spontaneous, bottom-up civic initiatives in a country where the state observes the subsidiarity principle.

The research shows that the sector's leaders believe that NGOs exert a limited influence on decision-making processes at both the central and lower government levels. Although the respondents mentioned some successes in this field, Poland does not have an institutionalized mechanism for exerting influence. Four factors are important here. First, the success of any initiative is due to the strong and widely recognized leaders in the sector, not to NGOs as such. Second, exerting influence is a matter of personal contacts and not of participation in an institutionalized dialogue. Third, the third sector is becoming more polarized in Poland, meaning that only big organizations with well-known leaders are able to influence decision-makers. Finally, attempts made to institutionalize the third sector, in particular the establishment of the Public Benefit Works Council, were unsatisfactory be-

cause of the Council's adherence to the oligarchic nature of the sector and the way it appoints its members. The respondents said the most effective mechanism for exerting influence is to have an NGO representative in political circles. This is just another example of the limited self-awareness of the sector's leaders.

The research proves that Poland lacks a long-standing tradition of social consultations. The respondents pointed to the sham nature of public administration initiatives and the tendency of the state to inform NGOs of a possibility to participate in consultations after the fact. NGO representatives are disappointed that the public administration fails to stick to prior arrangements. The research also shows that the sector's leaders do not necessarily grasp the idea behind social consultations. They do not realize that their opinions serve merely as voices in a discussion that may or may not be taken into account.

Regarding the factors inhibiting inter-sectoral relations, the research not only classified factors that were already known, but also identified new and equally important ones. Over the years, the lack of confidence between social partners and the centralization and the bureaucratization of the public administration have been problems. Another difficulty is the lack of continuity in funding, the uncertain career prospects in the third sector, and high turnover. The research also identified the polarization of the third sector in Poland and its increasingly oligarchic nature, the transformation of big NGOs into 'grant-hunters' (because EU structural funds are now available), and the deeply rooted public belief that third sector jobs are unpaid.

The research also highlighted another serious problem. The third sector in Poland lacks an image, and the self-awareness of its leaders is limited. One respondent said this was because when the third sector was developing in Poland, there was no conflict between NGOs and the state. Such conflicts help clarify positions, establish an identity for NGOs, and define mutual relations.

It was significant that the respondents blamed inhibiting factors in inter-sectoral relations more on the public administration than on NGOs. A few admitted that NGOs are still not professional partners for public institutions, that they look after their own interests, are unable to cooperate to achieve common goals in criticizing state policy, fail to advance concrete solutions, are dependent on public funds, are becoming too commercialized, and are unable to counter the over-representation of big organizations based in Warsaw.

Based on these results, we can formulate several recommendations. First, it is essential to prepare a national strategy for the development of civil society. While

several attempts have been made to draw up such a strategy in the past, another should be scripted. This strategy should not only include initiatives to provide short-term support for NGOs, but it should also lay the foundations for an educational scheme. In Poland, it is necessary to 'work with the grass roots', to launch initiatives improving civic education. At the beginning of the 1990s, in order to cut costs, schools closed down special-interest groups, student clubs, and extracurricular activities. It is now too much to expect that children and teens know how to get involved, to organize themselves, and to cooperate to attain common goals. Initiatives to improve civic education should be coordinated with educational system reform. The current socio-political situation in Poland creates favorable conditions for such activities, as the present government has often emphasized its support for civil society. The third sector should now be more motivated and should try to influence decision-makers to fulfill their election promises.

If NGOs fail to represent public interests, the influence they exert on the government will be ineffective, and a national strategy for the development of civil society will not be formulated. Knowledge of the initiatives undertaken at the government or regional administration level is rudimentary. Many NGOs are unaware that other organizations are acting on their behalf, which causes a break-down in the debate and hinders the adoption of a common standpoint. NGOs are failing to represent social interests, but if they expect to gain society's approval and support, they should not neglect issues of social understanding. The third sector lacks adequate channels to inform society of what NGOs are dealing with and what influences their choices of activity. It is thus questionable whether they have wide social support for their initiatives.

The poor state of legal culture inside the third sector and the complete lack of knowledge of the procedures and institutions necessary to exert influence on decision-making processes requires radical improvement. Currently, the only way to exert effective influence in Poland is to have political contacts. It is often the case that the head of a municipal council is also the president of an NGO and runs a local business at the same time.

NGOs lack not only the knowledge of the mechanisms for exerting influence, but also the willingness to use them, which only strengthens the detrimental practice of unofficial arrangements and quasi-consultations. The third sector should improve itself and maintain adequate standards of action if it wishes to create a better image and participate more effectively in decision-making.

It will certainly take some time to create and introduce a national strategy for developing civil society or to change the awareness of people working in the third

sector. It will also certainly not be an easy task, nor will it have an immediate impact in the form of greater opportunities to exert influence on decision-making processes. However, interim measures could accelerate more profound change. Poor communication regarding the results of decision-making processes results not only from the inefficient functioning of public administration, but also from neglect on the part of NGOs themselves. Those who take an active part in the consultations, make arrangements or take crucial decisions don't realize that they should disseminate information widely on the proceedings they participate in.

In Poland, the media play a negligible role in the development of social capital and civil society, and publish little information on NGO activities. This is due partly to the fact that the private media are treated by their owners as profit-making enterprises, and partly to the fact that the public media are failing to play their role properly. At the same time, it is unlikely that legislative changes could be a powerful remedy. The only solution is thus direct and systematic work by NGOs to improve knowledge and understanding in the media.

Another area where radical changes should be introduced is the Public Benefit Works Council. It is a mistake that its members are appointed and dismissed by the minister for social affairs; instead, they should be elected directly by NGO representatives. What is more, the Council should have a separate office and administrative base. It will continue to be inefficient if it overloads staff at the Public Benefit Department with administrative work.

As we have mentioned, a stigma has been attached to the public benefit status. Instead of boosting the prestige and significance of the NGO sector, it divides NGOs and generates conflicts. This could prevent the development of mechanisms for representing the whole sector's interests. The public benefit status should be abolished in the Polish legal system.

Some thought should be given to the challenges faced by NGOs in light of these problems. Certainly, not all of these issues can be overcome – for instance, the financial problems of nonprofit organizations are to a great extent intrinsic to the nonprofit sector. NGOs will always be 'recipients' of aid and will have to accept the inconveniences that result. The nonprofit sector in Poland is also still developing and in the long term has to gain stability and independence. Access to European structural funds will not assure these features, as they cannot be used to develop capital.

Surely, however, some of the problems described in this report can be solved. In order to do that, the nonprofit sector should undertake two kinds of activities.

First, NGOs should publicize examples of good intra-sectoral cooperation. Good practices include effective and transparent relations with public administration institutions based on institutionalized forms of dialogue. This could strengthen the third sector's position, because through the transparency and predictability of the activities it undertakes, decision-makers will understand that NGOs can constitute healthy competition but do not pose a threat to the sphere managed by public administration.

The popularization and imitation of good practices will give NGOs a chance to find a place in intra-sectoral relations, which, in consequence, will mitigate the problem of the self-awareness of the sector's leaders and the lack of trust between NGOs and public administration. The basis for the creation of clear relations is mutual trust between partners and the conviction that NGOs and public institutions not only co-exist, but to some extent are mutually dependent.

Second, NGOs should unite and create federations to represent their common interests. Only a strong partner is an equal partner. In Germany, almost every organization belongs to an umbrella organization or a federation, whose representatives create networks of individuals responsible for particular issues. The basis of this federalization, however, should be honesty and an acceptance that umbrella bodies will only represent truly common interests. The consolidation of the NGO environment based on those principles will also counter the polarization and oligarchic nature of the sector.

To create clear relations during federalization, the representative functions of umbrella organizations have to be separated from the functions of the supporting infrastructure. The transparent financing of infrastructure organizations is also important to avoid conflicts of interest between them and their beneficiaries (such as when applying for the same grants).

Summary

The research shows that over the past few years, the Polish non-governmental sector has witnessed no qualitative changes or improvements in inter-sectoral relations. The lack of confidence between the social partners and the centralization and bureaucratization of public administration have long been a problem. Another alarming issue is the increasing polarization and oligarchic nature of the third sector in Poland. Problems also include the low level of legal culture in NGOs and their failure to grasp the idea behind the consultation process. In Poland so far, no institutionalized or systematized mechanisms of exerting influence have emerged. The key here is the individual relationships of NGO leaders with decision-makers

and lobbying. Exerting effective influence is a matter of having many personal contacts, not of participating in an institutionalized dialogue. It is even more worrying that Polish society lacks a natural willingness to associate and to cooperate to achieve common goals. The exceptional wave of civic initiative that followed the events of 1989 has been replaced by stagnation. Also of concern is that the third sector has no identity and its leaders lack self-awareness. The NGO sector is becoming increasingly alienated from the environment in which it originated – civil society. NGOs have a lot of work to do if they care about their image and want to participate effectively in the decision-making process.

It is worth considering what actions and what fields NGOs should pursue in order to solve their problems. The near future certainly belongs to expert organizations. By disseminating their knowledge and providing analyses based on research they shape the attitudes not only of the general public but also of decision-makers. Their activities can also shape the self-awareness of NGO leaders and help to clearly define relations between NGOs and public administration. They can also help to build the sector's image and promote it. The activity of *think-tanks* also holds out hope for building mutual trust among the partners in intra-sectoral cooperation.

The quality of intra-sectoral relations depends on the advocacy organizations that represent the interests of particular social groups. They should emphasize profiting from institutionalized mechanisms of communication and influence. By acting according to clearly defined principles, advocacy organizations will confirm the sector's conviction that institutionalized mechanisms of influence are effective. It is also important that organizations are open to other potential partners in the advocacy process.

While maintaining transparency and abiding by clear competence rules they should cooperate with political parties, trade unions and employers' organizations, enabling a consolidation of the entities responsible for the quality of social and civic dialogue. The dissemination of such practices will create a situation in which the sector's leaders will not feel the need for direct involvement in politics.

In terms of the development of the third sector's image, it is worth asking whether organizations that monitor the activities of the public administration (watchdogs) should not also monitor the actions of NGOs in influencing decision-making processes. Perhaps their opinions will give the sector added motivation to profit from existing institutionalized forms of dialogue.

Finally, 'grass-roots' work with regard to intra-sectoral relations depends on organizations that provide social services. Usually these are small, local organizations

that offer a foundation for cooperation between the third sector and the public administration. Clear and transparent cooperation between service organizations and public institutions should create 'sectoral resources of good practices'. By reinforcing the public conviction that NGOs are an important and needed social resource, they can prevent a potential crisis in public trust, like that faced by the NGO sectors in the US and Great Britain.

Slovakia

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Introduction

The topic of NGOs has been covered before in several studies and publications, which mapped their development and looked at their roles and contributions. This study seeks to bring something new to what we know already by reflecting on the relationship between the state and NGOs, and the role of NGOs within this relationship since 1989 in the eyes of the people involved – NGOs themselves[17].

Some 35 respondents shared their views with us. They were chosen for their diverse professional and civic backgrounds, which we felt would reflect the broadest spectrum of views.

Given that there are more than 30,000 formally registered non-profit organizations in Slovakia, our sample is negligible. Moreover, in Slovakia there are around 7,000 active NGOs (calculated from the number of organizations who registered to be assigned the 2% tax contribution). However, in most cases respondents tried to comment on the situation throughout the NGO sector, meaning that their statements relate to the broader group of NGOs and are not only representative of their own organizations. Our respondents also tended to be active and involved leaders on the NGO scene. Several respondents were observers of the NGO scene, and through their involvement we tried to secure the input of voices that were less personally concerned. Most of our respondents were and are personally involved in the NGO sector, but we felt that their first-hand knowledge of the issues and their heterogeneity would outweigh any concerns with objectivity.

This text does not profess to be an academic one, but instead tries to offer inspiration for those thinking about the future relationship between NGOs and the state and the overall role of NGOs in society. In our findings we present a wide spectrum of views without trying to unite or quantify them, but rather to point out nuances and differences in opinions on the topic.

This text consists of two parts. In the first we present the views of respondents, while in the second we try to interpret these views and formulate some recom-

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17   A reflection on the relationship between the state and NGOs from the political point of view can be found in the publication *Dovidieť za roh. 21 politikov o mimovládnych organizáciach* ("Looking Around the Corner: 21 Politicians on NGOs"), eds Majchrák J.- Marošiová L., IVO, Bratislava 2003.

mendations and outcomes. The quotations of respondents are published in italics in order to preserve their anonymity.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews based on common questions used in all four countries. The minimum number of respondents was determined to be 30, and it was agreed that the sample should cover Slovak NGOs both by topic and region. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed by Boris Strečanský, Marcel Zajac and Adriana Strečanská. The text was sent for comment to respondents, who had a chance to respond personally or in writing.

Interviews were conducted by Milica Danková, Lucia Gregorová, Boris Strečanský, and Marcel Zajac. Transcripts were done by Barbora Paulenová. We would also like to thank Zuzana Fialová and Adriana Strečanská for their advice in qualitative analysis of interviews.

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Findings

Perception of NGOs

The term *"non-governmental organization"* (*NGO)* is rich and understood in diverse ways, which often gives people the impression it is ambiguous. In fact, the term has various meanings, as well as a quickly changing context that multiplies its meanings.[18]

Based on the answers provided in the interviews, there are two views of NGOs. One emphasizes the value character of NGOs (people, values, common good), while the second takes a wider and more neutral view, emphasizing the instrumental nature of NGOs (institutional frameworks for activities, formal-legal attributes, etc.).

The most important NGO attributes and characteristics seem to be the following three:

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18   In foreign literature there are several definitions of what NGO means. According to sociologist Lester M. Salamon, NGOs have five attributes: A formal structure, a private (non-governmental) character, a purpose that does not include creating a profit to be shared by their owners or founders, independence and autonomy, and a voluntary nature including a considerable portion of voluntary work. Salamon, L., *Global Civil Society: An Overview*. The John Hopkins Comparative NonProfit Sector Project, 2003.

Human and civil dimension: NGOs are founded by people, citizens. They are an expression of **private** initiatives and have a private sector nature. Behind them are people who want to do something to help society. They often depend on individual will-power and motivation, on people *"who think differently",* who do a lot of volunteer work. These tend to be people who pursue goals that are beneficial for others and also people that want to solve problem of their concern. It is irrelevant whether they are just a civic initiative or if they are a registered organization.

Value dimension: An NGO is a place where people can unite to implement their vision of the common good; where they can find ideals and values such as empathy, solidarity, enthusiasm, altruism, humanism, concern for the environment, reciprocity, and a desire to change things for the better.

"It's about the opportunity to do good, but in a normal social context and with the feeling that it is accepted in a normal way, that it is a way for people to express themselves. It also involves certain community actions, although society still does not always accept this in a positive way."

People from NGOs also see themselves as different from others, even though their values are not a guarantee that they will be successful:
"I meet almost only positive people. The people who come here are those who have not been touched by this era."
"NGOs are larger or smaller clubs of idealists."
"Among NGOs you can also find a few incompetent people."

Demarcation between the state and the market: NGOs help to stabilize a country's economic and political systems. Their ***non-governmental*** character denotes a ***non-market*** character, which means that NGOs have to keep their distance from both the market (in line with their *non-profit character)* and the state. The boundaries between the market, the state, and the non-governmental sphere are not clear, and overlap:

"The term NGO was coined in the 1950s, when the non-governmental character of these organizations was emphasized. This was strengthened after the fall of Communism, because in 1989, everything was governmental. The emphasis on the non-profit character of NGOs came later as the economic role of NGOs became more apparent. Due to developments in our country, NGOs tended to be perceived more as private initiatives of citizens than public sector organizations, in conflict with the EU view. This division according to sector was helpful at a certain point, but today the boundaries among the sectors often overlap. In our context, the fact that citizens are able to as-

sociate by themselves means that NGOs are non-governmental, even though in certain aspects they are often close to the private sector, and in their mission they may be close to the state."

Relationships among NGOs and other sectors depend to the large extent on their context. For example, their non-governmental character, *"in the sense of opposition to the state, is not required"*. The demarcation between the state and the market also helps to identify state and market shortcomings, which are called "white spaces". However, the non-governmental character of NGOs also invites negative perceptions:

"During negotiations people had a feeling that NGOs were something anti-administration or seditious."

In a clear demarcation between the state and the market, many NGOs also emphasized their *"ideological and material independence from the state and business"* as well as their freedom:

"NGOs are also based on volunteering or freedom. This feeling is an advantage. You can apply your ideas, creative notions or beliefs more easily than anywhere else."

Other views of NGOs peg them as **organized, non-profit, and voluntary in character**. Their non-profit character is often wrongly interpreted to mean they are incapable of making a profit; in fact, NGOs can make a profit, they just can't use it arbitrarily. People also make a distinction between **healthy and unhealthy activities of NGOs**.

"For me, a healthy NGO is able to find a balance between how much it uses for itself and how much it dedicates to the things it considers important. I'm not talking just about money, but also about energy, about anything."

However, NGOs should not be idealized or romanticized. There are all sorts of NGOs, not just those based on altruism or solidarity. Nor is every civic activity profitable for civil society. This too is a part of their diversity.

"The most limiting factor is that Slovakia is small and everybody knows everybody else. All relationships are marked by clientelism, and this is true of NGOs as well. Just as there are good, average and bad people in society, the same is also true of NGOs."

Other opinions on NGOs emphasize the framework they provide, not the func-

tions or values they promote: *"NGOs do not have much in common apart from their legal form. Otherwise, they are very diverse."* NGOs provide an institutional framework for the activities of citizens, which in itself is very important.

NGO developments in Slovakia since 1989

When asked about NGO developments after 1989, some respondents cited milestones in the area of domestic policy, while others saw milestones in the area of funding. These views were often interconnected.

1. **Domestic policy** (the political role of NGOs – NGO participation in the fight for liberal-democratic rules and democracy and in the struggle over what direction Slovakia would take in 1989, 1992, and 1996; the third sector S.O.S. campaign in 1998, and the mobilization campaign called OK '98)
2. **Legal, fiscal, and institutional conditions** for NGO activities (1990 Law on Association of Citizens, provisions allowing citizens to participate in decisions on environmental issues, Vladimír Mečiar's Law on Foundations, the accession of Slovakia to the Aarhus agreement, the Law on Access to Information, the 2% tax legislation, efforts to eliminate the 2% contribution, the operation of associations – draft bill on societies, efforts to limit access to information and participation in decision-making)
3. **Self-esteem of NGOs** (boom in the number of NGOs, identity of NGOs, establishment of infrastructure, Gremium of the Third Sector, regional gremia, service center for the third sector, campaigns, conflicts with the state, finding partnership relationships with the state and municipalities, generational change)
4. **Funding** (arrival of American private foundations, foreign public sources such as the EU and USAID, the development of domestic sources in the form of the 2% tax designation, collections, corporate philanthropy, the withdrawal of foreign donors, problems with EU funds)

More about the development of the NGO sector according the statements of respondents can be found in Attachment B.

The contribution of NGOs to society

How has the contribution of NGOs to society after 1989 been viewed? The respondents saw it in terms of the changed policies, laws and decisions which had an impact on the entire society. According to them, some contributions have changed the nature of social consciousness (such as the development of volun-

teerism and philanthropy) and increased civic participation in decision-making processes[19].

Two activities where NGOs played a role were singled out as having been impor-tant for society as a whole:

The OK 98 voter mobilization campaign before parliamentary elections in 1998. Through this activity, NGOs helped to change Slovakia's political orientation from authoritarian to democratic, and its foreign policy orientation towards the EU and NATO. The public started to see NGOs as a special element within society and to better understand their advocacy role. However, one respondent said that this campaign had warped relationships among NGOs as well as between NGOs and politicians, and argued that the effects of this process are visible even today. The political opposition started to take for granted that NGOs were on their side, which had a negative impact on the government/NGO relationship during the eight years they were in office. On the other hand, some NGOs expected more favorable treatment from the government as a reward for their contribution to the victory of a united coalition against authoritarian Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. This expec-tation was unreasonable, and had it been realized, NGOs would have lost their in-dependence.

The 2000 Law on Access to Information. This law goes beyond basic democratic principles as well as beyond similar legislation in Europe. It is a major contribution to wider public participation in public policy. NGOs defined the content of the law, prepared the text, and shepherded it through the legislative process. In addition, they also created an opportunity for public debate and civic pressure that influ-enced legislators, and provided professional and lobbying support aimed at MPs during the approval of the law. After it was passed, NGOs provided educational and litigation support for institutions affected by the law, and monitored its imple-mentation.

Contributions to changes in **social consciousness** are also seen as positive, such as gradually helping the public to become more comfortable with fundraising drives (e.g. the Hour for Children, eRko), encouraging participation at the local or

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19   The contribution of NGOs to society in the transformation period has been analyzed by seve-ral authors, including Martin Bútora, *Pôsobenie think-tankov v slovenskej zahraničnej politike: genéza, výsledky, problémy* (The Activities of Think-Tanks in Slovak Foreign Policy, Speech at a con-ference on think-tanks and their political and economic influence, Prague, American Information Center, US Embassy, September 2005), Andrej Salner (2006), *The Costs and Benefits of NGOs in Slo-vakia: Selected Cases*, Slovak Governance Institute, *or* Ivan Krastev (2000), "Post-Communist Think-Tanks: Making and Faking Influence," in Diane Stone (ed.) *Banking on Knowledge*, Routledge.

national levels, bringing new topics up for public debate (domestic violence, environmental protection), developing volunteerism and a social ethos of voluntary involvement, providing development aid in foreign countries, and personal self-realization.

The referendum on EU accession, which was only successful by a narrow margin, was also a strategic decision to a certain extent influenced by NGOs. However, NGOs have been active in both ways, supporting and opposing the accession.

In addition to the contributions of NGOs in these areas, respondents added the following:

- The creation of expert support for reforms that were launched after 1998 (decentralization, reform of the public administration system, reform of the judicial system, social system reform, etc.).
- The creation, annotation, and modernization of public policies (e.g. decentralization, public administration reform, draft Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic and National Strategy of Sustainable Development). The participation of NGO activists in these processes was also due to the fact that "thanks" to the hostile domestic political situation in the 1990s (Mečiarism), many reform figures had been forced out of areas like science, education and public administration towards the NGO environment, where they had more room for self-expression. After the change in the government in 1998, the state began to accept and implement the ideas of these experts.
- Initiating laws for NGOs (2% law) – The 2% tax law, which allowed individuals and companies to assign 2% of their taxes due to the NGO of their choice, helped to replace dwindling development aid from foreign countries for public benefit institutions (NGOs, schools, municipalities) and increased the civic awareness of citizens and corporations. At the same time, this mechanism was also criticized by people from NGOs. *"It was an important but unfortunate decision,"* said one, noting that the 2% mechanism was not immune to abuse.
- Influencing laws promoting greater justice, sensitivity toward minorities, and interest in marginalized topics
- Litigation against the authorities on issues such as property seizures, protection of victims and marginalized communities, access to justice, and protection for the rights of citizens against mistakes made by the state. For example, NGO lobbying improved the performance of public administration by changing how the judicial branch was managed and thereby improving transparency and justice in the selection of judges.

- Social service delivery based on a combination of the old and new systems
- Conflict moderation, such as in the relationship between the Roma and Non-Roma. Regarding the Roma, many changes were achieved such as in education, in creating the position of a Roma teaching assistant or a Roma health assistant, and the establishment of pre-entry schooling for Roma children.

"Thanks to NGOs, some conflicts have softened, such as that between the Roma and Slovaks, as well as social conflicts."

Tools for social change

NGOs use a wide spectrum of tools in achieving change. **Public debate** is one of the most important of these tools. Some means used by NGOs to launch a public debate include:

- Mobilization of the public (campaigns, protests, direct actions, education of the wider public on specific issues;
- Presentation of issues in the media;
- Negotiations, expert analysis, concepts, dialogue, argumentation;
- Participation in decision-making processes (such as sitting on commissions);
- Lobbying;
- Targeted actions (i.e. the creation of a nature preserve, the establishment of a hospice, the announcement of a fundraising drive, etc.)

Along with these tools, the **environment in which** NGOs work plays a role. Within this environment, there are important **personalities** who play the role of small forces[20.] with the ability to positively influence situations and achieve great results. Another factor is also the social context (e.g. the political situation from 1994-1998 or that in 1989). Last but not least, NGOs use available mechanisms that open room for participation, such as laws on governance or public comment on suggestions proposed by ministries or the government.

At the municipal level, respondents also mentioned the following tools:
- New binding regulations on the development of NGOs;
- Agreements on cooperation between NGOs and municipalities;

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20   For more information on micro-trends and the power of small forces, see Mark Penn, *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes.*

- Civil committees at the municipal level;
- Binding regulations on public meetings.

The public and NGOs

Respondents did not identify any major scandal that had influenced the public image of NGOs. One exception could be the political activities of NGOs, which are viewed differently by politicians, the public and NGOs.

"Yes, a situation arose when NGOs started to be perceived in a polarized way, in the sense that they were marked as supporters of the government elected in 1998 and as enemies of the old government constellation. This was partly true, even though NGOs gradually became critical of the new government as well. Even though it took quite a long time, many NGOs were willing to tolerate various stumbles by the new government because they believed it to be a lesser evil than the previous one. Thus, they began to be perceived as an ally of this pro-Western government."

NGOs gained greater respect in negotiations with the state after their **recognition** among the public increased.

In some cases, NGOs succeeded in opening a public debate on topics that would otherwise not have attracted so much attention.

"Look at the High Tatras mountain resort after the devastating windstorm in 2004. NGOs intervened, and offered the public another view on environmental protection".

NGOs are linked to several other activities and contributions where there presence is less evident.

"Maybe the wider public is unable to say whether this or that was arranged by the third sector. However, if people start to see some things differently, that's already something you can measure. Therefore, it's not so important that people know that the approval of the law on access to information was led by the Citizen and Democracy organization; what is important is that today, people have the right to ask the state for information, and the state is obliged to answer."
"For NGOs it is not important whether the public knows about their contributions. Of course, if they do, it's good, but if not, NGOs will live without it."

Several respondents mentioned **stereotypes** that NGOs fall into.

"Unfortunately, many discussions lately have been about money – the law on founda-

tions, the 2% tax assignation – meaning that the public has seen all of the events around NGOs through the lens of money. That established a stereotype that they are interested only in money. Similarly, the wider public was critical of the pressure NGOs put on the state to secure funding for themselves."

Several respondents seemed frustrated at an environment that still seems unfavorable towards NGOs.

"NGOs are still like UFOs."
"My feeling is that for the public, there are NGOs and "NGOs". The good NGOs do charity, work with children, and help those who are sick. Then there are NGOs that block the construction of highways and end up making it more expensive for the state and I don't know what else, where I feel the perception is rather negative. The fact that they stopped construction of the freeway in Žiar nad Hronom is not the fault of the association which brought attention to the fact that they had broken the law, but of those who broke the law in the first place. However, public opinion has it that the association is blocking the construction of some highway. Therefore I have the feeling that there is a problem somewhere, that we are losing the communication battle."

Public consultations

Public consultations are required or enabled by Slovak law (the law on environmental impact assessments, participation by citizens in different bodies, rules of government, the institute of mass annotation, etc.). There are also formal provisions for consulting with the wider public. NGO representatives feel strongly that the state lacks a pro-active approach towards learning the public's views and opinions of its plans.

Despite the unwillingness of the state to use them on a regular basis, public consultations create a space that the respondents believe could be put to better use to benefit the whole society. As a tool, consulting is used successfully in Western Europe, where – as one respondent's states – one or the other side can be convinced to accept a decision they originally did not agree with. Public consultations reduce friction and contribute to the acceptance of diversity and the finding of agreement.

Respondents mentioned a wide spectrum of experiences of public consultations before strategic decisions by the state, including a refusal to permit them because they slow the decision-making process, or cases in which the rules were manipulated or the entire process was a mere formality.

"They don't call us. They held consultations on environmental protection laws, and called in tourists and experts on caves, but not environmentalists."
"Public consultations are a formality. It's just theater, something that has to be done, but that doesn't have any effect. On the issue of Euro-funds in 2003, there was chaos, there were no rules, partnerships were faked, there was no clear procedure, and NGOs had almost no chance to influence the result. During 2005/2006, NGOs boycotted the whole process until the government accepted them as real partners in the debate. Ironically, this boycott of public consultations became the strongest weapon that NGOs wielded."

The public administration has clearly learned how to use consultations for its own benefit. The situation is perpetuated by ignorance and the attitudes of bureaucrats.

"The fewer problems the better – that's how bureaucrats think."

In some cases, certain individuals invited NGOs to take part in the decision-making process, such as during the creation of the law on access to information, or the laws on waste. However, in other cases they prevented the public from participating in decision-making in any way possible. Sometimes, the same bureau deals in different ways even with the same group of people – on one issue it invites them to take part with courtesy, while on another it does not let them.

There are many examples of good practice in consulting, such as the law on lobbying, the National Sustainable Development Strategy, the Energy Policy, the Slovak Development Aid Strategy, the requirement for a barrier-free environment for disabled people, and other instances where NGOs felt an openness in communication and that their comments were processed in the right way.

It works differently at the municipal level. On the one hand there are a large number of municipalities and therefore more interactions in mutual relationships. On the other hand, municipalities handle issues of vital interest to citizens. To enforce these interests, citizens join together in active groups. Municipalities also find it easier to agree on changes in the community with its inhabitants.

Lately, especially in 2007, mechanisms for civic participation have been limited. For example, the law on environmental impact assessments (EIA), the law on protection of nature and country, the draft bill on societies, suggested changes to the law on access to information – all included changes that narrowed the space for the participation of citizens and consultations with the public.

Relationship between the state and NGOs

The respondents held diverse views of the relationship between the state and NGOs. The nature of this relationship ranges from ignoring each other at one end, to a partnership at the other. There are two opposing perspectives on this topic, reflecting the different experiences and backgrounds of the respondents.

Some expressed displeasure that the relationship between the state and NGOs was unsatisfactory, saying that there is mistrust on both sides.

Models of NGO-state relationships

1. **Ignoring each other:** Both parties live for themselves, take no notice of the other and mind their own business.

2. **Dependence:** The relationship between NGOs and the state strengthens especially due to the growing financial dependence of NGOs on the state. This is especially the case in the area of services. There is concern, however, about the unwillingness of the state and different politicians to support NGOs more generously through EU and other funding mechanisms.

3. **Negation, asymmetry, animosity:** The relationship is not a partnership; it is asymmetric, full of misunderstandings, and almost hostile.

   "What first comes to mind is David and Goliath. The current authorities regard NGOs as unpleasant, buzzing flies that call attention to issues that need to be solved. NGOs represent an annoyance that has to be treated carefully and warily so the authorities don't have problems."

   "It's hard to describe this relationship in general terms because it differs from case to case. But in general, if you mention NGOs in a civil sense, the attitude of bureaucrats tends to be negative."

   Some service-providing organizations also feel that their position in their relationship with the state is negative.

   "The average bureaucrat working for the regional or local state administration distrusts the third sector, and is convinced that they could do things better by themselves if they had the people and the money. They do not

see NGOs as making any contribution or bringing any innovation to service activities."

"They want NGOs to be at their disposal and handle the most difficult cases."

During the last year we have seen a trend by which the state, which used to authorize NGOs to provide certain services, is now withdrawing this authorization.

4. **Steadiness and respect:** The relationship between the state and NGOs is balanced. NGOs have a role. Their image is not as political as it was in the 1990s, and NGOs are not too reliant on the state financially because the state is not interested in giving NGOs significant support. Recently, this situation has begun to change slightly.

    "At the beginning of this electoral term, the relationship between NGOs and the state was one of mutual respect. But during the last year (2007) it became more complicated. I don't think, however, that things can get to the point at which the state completely ignores the NGO sector, so I think it basically depend on what types of people are in government."

5. **Ambivalence:** The relationship is naturally ambivalent and changing. The role of NGOs is to fill in "holes" in the market where the state is ineffective. The natural role of NGOs is also to criticize, to hold up a mirror to authority, and to stir public opinion.

The relationship between the state and NGOs since 1989 has been determined by several factors, including **domestic policy** (here, we should ask whether this is just a Slovak phenomenon, or whether it is true of other countries in the region). We should also ask if the polarization in Slovak policy since the 1990s has prevented the modernization of Slovakia and influenced the nature of the state-NGO relationship.

"In comparison with other Visegrad countries, NGOs in Slovakia have a far more developed tradition of entering the political process with respect to domestic political developments and transformation, a tradition that was founded during the period of Meciarism in the 1990s, which the other countries did not experience. Our NGOs have more experience of it and at the same time the ambition not to leave things as they are. When you look at the period of the Kacziński brothers in Poland, the civic voice was barely audible there. In Hungary, after scandals touched off by the prime minister's

lies, civic organizations did not play a central role, but left that to other segments of society. In the Czech Republic, developments were less dramatic. Former President Václav Havel shares the values of civil society, which is why he formed a different kind of dialogue with NGOs that did his successor, Václav Klaus."

The relationship between NGOs and the state as a political force is a very sensitive issue in Slovakia due to the nature of domestic political developments. The perception that NGOs are involved in influencing public opinion and public policy is controversial and even unacceptable for a part of the public. On the other hand, there is a strong belief that NGOs are legitimate participants in the political process, and that this role is in line with the constitution (which grants the right to directly and indirectly participate in public policy). Due to political developments from 1994-1998, when the Meciar government was in confrontation with civil society, some NGOs became allies of the democratic opposition. As Dostál (2003)[21] stated, *"the problem with this alliance was that politics was not the main agenda of civil society institutions, and as a consequence, this alliance could lead to civil society becoming dependent on the next government."*

One respondent added:

"After 1998 I had the feeling that when the ruling elite changed, some NGOs expected favors from the new government as a reward for contributing to the victory of the united coalition against Meciar. This was inappropriate."

Another observer said a new quality emerged during this period:

"The situation changed after 1998, and things were divided into platforms and topics, and for the first time in a long time, NGOs cooperated with the ruling structures. At the same time, the NGO sector maintained its creative ability to influence the state, as well as its ability to be a critic and a monitor. It was a new challenge, a new moment, and I think at that point, all these three features found expression."

NGOs see a lack of acceptance from the state, which manifests itself **the failure of NGOs to grow closer to the state** or municipal **institutions.**

"A few people do something to try to change society, but they are outside society."

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21 See Ondrej Dostál, "Občianska spoločnosť" (Civil Society) in: *Slovensko na ceste do neznáma* (Slovakia on the Road to the Unknown), eds. Gál F.-Gonda P.-Kollár M.-Mesežnikov G.-Timoracký M.-Zajac P., IVO 2003.

A lack of consensus at the elite level is an important factor as well.

"In Slovakia, we failed to reach a broader social consensus – not just a political consensus on the rules of the game, but a real consensus that applies no matter who holds power. It is a consensus that was also achieved in Romania, where despite the difficult economic and social situation and massive corruption, the elites were able to invest large resources into areas where they knew the state needed it. And then there is the lack of time – our elites just need to make money quickly. They don't seek the right approach, and could care less that if they invest something now, in 30 years it will bring a rich harvest. In Slovakia, it was never that way. Whoever was in power needed to make money now. This has brought a vulgar, shallow, and almost frightening material culture to this ostensibly Christian country".

For the state, its relationship with NGOs is also a problem because of the issue of representation. Views differ on whether NGOs should be represented towards the state. One view says that the civic sector has no need of representation as by its nature it is pluralistic. Another view emphasizes the need for representation:

"It's a pity, because at that time (1998) we had a historic chance to win something that is standard in normal countries, for example a status similar to that of trade unions. Maybe today we would not be experiencing certain problems if there was one self-confident body representing the third sector that could not be fobbed off with the disarming question "who do you represent?""

The fact that there is no universal body representing NGOs has prevented them from forming a common concept of their relationship with the state. As a result, there is a huge variety of relationships between NGOs and the state that are not organized and exist on different levels.

Relationship between NGOs and municipalities
Relationships between NGOs and municipalities tend to be less stable. Between electoral cycles, the turnover in municipal staff tends to be huge. On the other hand, relationships with the state are more consistent, as the fluctuation in state bureaucrats is lower. There is also a wide spectrum of relationships between municipalities and NGOs from positive to negative.

The role of NGOs from 1989 to today

From the point of view of the **role of NGOs towards the state,** we can identify three basic approaches:

1. The exploitation by NGOs of **"white spots"**, or areas not served well by the state or the market, either because it is not worth the investment, or because they do not have the tools. Here we can include the following sub-roles:
   - **Innovative role**: Experimenting, pilot solutions. In Slovakia, small research units must continue their work so there are leaders to open debates, and expert authors to handle issues in a sensitive manner and suggest innovations.
   - **Value role:** Bringing new values into society.
   - **Socialization role** – collecting experiences for public life, political socialization, human resources circulation, increasing participation.

2. **Mirror and amplifier:** The main role of NGOs is to hold a mirror up to the authorities, to criticize and provide opposition to the authorities and the market, to provide feed-back and to amplify voices not heard by the authorities, those of weaker, marginalized or minority groups. Sometimes NGOs must also go into conflict, which carries with it a negative side – the energy that is spent on conflicts could be used in a better way. These roles help NGOs to help the state serve its citizens.

   "My experience of being a bureaucrat for four years is that it is better to look for feedback than to experience a confrontation later."

3. **Cooperation:** The main role is partnership, coexistence for the benefit of society. NGOs focus on their missions while the state and municipalities are glad they have a partner with a common interest in increasing the quality of life and democracy. NGOs create a space where citizens help each other as well as society as a whole. If this potential is not used, energy is wasted. Examples of positive cooperation abound, but they are not discussed and often are taken for granted. The **service role** also belongs to this category. In addition to other state or public institutions, NGOs also provide services, with the difference that they provide them with passion and imagination.

Roles **overlap** each other, which causes problems with the perception of NGOs from the side of politics and the public administration. The path from misunderstanding and confrontation (mutual mistrust and insufficient knowledge of NGOs) towards a mature partnership (mutual trust and acknowledgement of the importance of NGOs for society) will continue to be pursued in future, as will seemingly incompatible roles (criticism and cooperation). Moreover, as one respondent stated, in liberal-democracies, NGOs must be regarded in some sense as **unconceivable**.

Future tasks of NGOs, challenges and barriers to performance

Ideal and actual roles of NGOs in future

When talking about their expectations for the future, respondents said they wished NGOs to continue in their role as watchdogs of transparency and as providers of feedback to the state. More than ever before, they said, the innovative-pilot role of NGOs must be developed to advance cooperation with the state and municipalities.

According to one point of view, the critical attitude of NGOs towards the state (the mirror role) is not only contextual and "forced" on them, it is also key to their existence. Power tends to corrupt, which is why there will always be a need for mechanisms to hold up a mirror to authority or to supply those things that the state and the market cannot provide. Along with the media, NGOs also play these roles.

According to another view, in an ideal world, municipalities and the state should act in such ways that NGOs are not needed to oversee openness and transparency. In an ideal future, **partnership cooperation** would occur, in which NGOs would be perceived not as the enemy, but as partners, as constructive opponents and critical friends. NGOs should keep their **"mirror"** roles, and the state should support them in it, knowing that criticism is useful and necessary for the best administration of public affairs. In this future, the state would cultivate NGOs and their advocacy role. For example, the European Commission supports projects that criticize the EC itself (e.g. on the environment). Many respondents called for this "European ideal" of the consultative process and participation to be enacted in Slovakia. In this process, NGOs could be agents of change in the area of services, and could act as an integrating element, participating in decision-making and co-operating with the state on solving problems and mobilizing citizens. Some respondents insisted that NGOs keep their financial and political **independence** regardless of the role they play, in order that they remain able to participate in the

making, implementation, evaluation and control of decisions, but without close financial ties with the state. One must ask whether this is really possible, and under what conditions it might be achieved.

According to several respondents, the ideal role for NGOs in Slovakia is to further democratization, to connect with other sectors and with the rest of the world, and to develop awareness of our European and global responsibilities.

The innovative and experimental role is considered an ideal, but also a realistic goal. **However, although it has a great deal of potential, it is under-exploited.**

Many feel that the real role of NGOs is to open up new topics that life brings. The reason is that, unlike bureaucrats, they are in closer contact with ordinary people.

External barriers
Domestic politics remains a sore point in the relationship between the state and NGOs. The leftist-nationalist-populist government of Robert Fico formed in July 2006 has shown a tendency toward centralization, towards decreasing the level of participation in democracy, and towards supporting forced patriotism. The government, as do some municipalities, feels it can do without NGO partners, and if any are needed, they prefer "their own". This has influenced society's general perception of the NGO role. Some stability has come from Slovakia's geopolitical "mooring" to the EU and NATO. On the other hand, this fact leads to a false sense of satisfaction with the current state of affairs. Clientelism and corruption remain serious illnesses afflicting Slovak society, and for this reason as well, the role of NGOs as watchdogs of openness and transparency in state conduct remains an important one.

The weak and unstable financial environment and the **lack of independent funding** form an equally important barrier that increases the financial dependence of NGOs on public resources. According to one respondent, around 100 million Slovak crowns in independent funds should be circulating in the NGO environment. However, in reality this is far from the case. In Slovakia, no one ever created independent financial mechanisms in the form of foundations with their own endowments or programs funded from public sources to provide institutional support to NGOs.

"Corporations transform the third sector in keeping with their own goals; altruistic corporate activity does not exist. Corporations identify and support things that "need to

be done" based primarily on their PR needs and only secondarily based on the goals or needs of the community".

Getting money from foundations is not without problems of its own:

"Hardly any foundations that provide finances for NGOs have a feedback system in place for measuring the effectiveness of the money that is spent from the strategic point of view. They neither measure how the needs were met nor what the community thinks. The shortcomings of foundations include stereotypes, a lack of flexibility, and the pursuit of their own goals. In fact, Slovakia has no non-profit programs of its own. Those that do exist are the "extended hand" of foreign donors, who tend to take an insensitive approach to our conditions."

Ironically, it is not only a sufficiency of funds that creates dependencies but also the lack of them; neither contributes to the healthy development of NGOs. Adjusting to EU funding requirements is an on-going process, and the access of smaller and mid-sized NGOs to funds is severely limited by the bureaucratic requirements for obtaining and using them.

"We have to take a complex approach to the funding of the third sector, including funding for sport, culture, the environment, social issues and the church. For this, each sector needs to get ready. Every segment needs to focus on its interests. However, some partnerships between these spheres should also exist. When this happens and the state, the business sector and NGOs are on the same level, then a partnership between NGOs and the state can be said to exist. That will take another 20 years.

Limited social and institutional experience with NGOs
- **Immaturity, insufficient development of sectors:** The state and business sectors are not sufficiently mature for partnership. This is also true of NGOs. Maturity takes time.
"I believe in gradual evolution - that with small steps, self-determination and determination within society of who is here for what will occur."
- **Dependence on the executive branch and the state:**
"In Slovakia, there is an executive branch, and everything else is dependent on it. The ethos of society is a secondary matter. It can not be created in 10 years, but needs 50, 60 or 100 years. It is an illusion to expect that in 10 years from now, Slovakia will function much better than it does now. I think that what NGOs have achieved during the last 15 years is very praiseworthy and valuable, despite how powerful the state is and how the political system works. This is exactly why NGOs need to put pressure on the state so that these basic parameters change in the future. Because if they

do not push the state, it will never change – the state will never give up its privileges, that is clear."

- **Being ignored:**
"Of all the external obstacles we face, being ignored is the greatest. I still encounter situations when NGOs are seen as a continuation of social organizations from before the revolution. This reduces their role in civil society for certain interest groups."

Cultural and historical factors

- Historical handicaps, conservatism, prejudice, a weaker tradition of associations, and a lack of natural authorities.
"A traditional form of conservatism still prevails in Slovak society and is prejudiced against the type of activity practiced by NGOs. Maybe this is also due to the relative absence of a tradition of association-type activities in comparison to the Czech Republic, Austria or Germany. These are historical handicaps. I feel sad especially because of the difference between Slovak and Czech societies – it seems as if in Slovakia, apart from several artistic figures who are heavily promoted by the media, we have no generally accepted natural authorities. In the Czech Republic there are hundreds of public figures who, regardless of who is in power, are considered as unquestionably wise people, natural authorities, authentic personalities, what have you. This is also a problem for the third sector in Slovakia, that we lack moral patrons to support us. Not even among ourselves do we respect what some of us have done, even when these people have proven a hundred times that their motivation is genuine and that they are not frauds. We would prefer to bury somebody alive just because they have a different opinion on a particular issue, rather than say "don't be angry, I have a different opinion, but of course I respect you"."

"There is a general suspicion and tradition that bureaucrats control everything within their purview, and that NGOs are not necessary. People distrust the motives of people who work for NGOs, and still do not understand why anyone would want to do such things. Bureaucrats are required to do them, but why do "those people" want to do them? There must be more to it than meets the eye."

- **Public passivity and the low level of social capital**
"The public is passive, and there is low social capital in terms of the number of people who are willing to become active."

Internal barriers

Poor **communication** with the public, the state administration and other partners is another weakness of NGOs, which continue to underestimate the role of public opinion and the role of the media in creating it.

Generational change, leaders, human resources: NGOs are undergoing a period when the first generation of leaders is leaving and those who remain are losing their ethos. They are trying to cover up this fact by appearing more professional and specialized; however, these are only managerial qualities and values. On the other hand, the increase in professionalism is a positive trend that is better preparing NGOs to find new resources, to use their existing resources more effectively, and through that to be a more reliable partner for the state as well as for business.

Another internal barrier is presented by the **attitudes of NGOs towards their own roles, to their partners and to themselves**. Some NGO leaders are self-critically asking themselves whether they are fulfilling their roles and the mission of their NGOs, and whether they really represent citizens or fulfill the expectations and needs of other NGOs, the public or their partners. However, this process of reflection remains insufficient, which is why NGOs are repeatedly failing to achieve the goals they set out in pursuit of. They need to focus more on obtaining feedback.

Another important factor is the **attitude** of NGOs as they enter relationships with business partners or the state. Some are being criticized for entering relationships only to get funding.

"NGOs suffer from a strange form of internal weakness that leaves them incapable of achieving their goals or keeping "face" in their relationships with corporations. In the name of funding they are willing to loose face by doing PR work for corporations, allowing these firms to use their names for PR purposes."

Another problem in the attitudes of NGOs is that some isolate themselves from other sectors and overestimate their worth: *"We are the good, they are the bad."*

Competition among NGOs is another internal barrier hurting internal communication, networking and the exchange of information. It even has elements of clientelism.

"Both internally and externally, the major limitation is that Slovakia is small, everybody knows everybody, and all relationships are influenced by clientelism. It would be an illusion to think that NGOs are free of clientelism."

Insufficient capacities (time, money, etc.). Many problems result from the inability to settle accounts for projects. Demands for accounting and administration have risen lately. However, some respondents blame a twisted funding system that imposes meaningless conditions on funding recipients.

"The problem lies in the bureaucracy related to grants, to fundraising. It takes up too many resources. If you want to do something, you need twice the energy to get the money to support it. It seems to me that the situation is getting worse. I see many new grant programs here – corporate and otherwise – but I have the feeling they are oriented towards leisure activities, to the pleasant life. They do not provide many resources to make systematic changes. It's a pity, but I understand why it is so."

The nature of the resources that are available also influences the operation of NGOs. These resources – especially EU funds and other public sources – are creating a situation in which – from the viewpoint of internal capacity – the people responsible for fundraising and financial management have strengthened their positions, while those responsible for programs and strategic development have not. There is a threat that if NGOs enter relationships without a strategy, they can seriously impair their critical role within society of helping to open a dialogue.

Insufficient professionalism among management is another barrier. Some NGOs are still burdened by prejudices against institutionalization – they take too much pride in their independence and their informal culture. Many NGOs also underestimate the importance of education and do not consider it worth investing in. Such attitudes are costing NGOs their position as leaders within society.

Other necessary changes

Education in general
- To secure more **global and civic education** at secondary schools and universities. This is necessary in order that NGOs become more involved in discussions at the European level and take more responsibility for future developments than they do today.
- As a part of civic education, **voluntary service** could be tested to provide civic experiences for young people and help shape their civic attitudes. The Community Service concept could be used as a model of semi-compulsory volunteer work for children and youth.
- Strengthening **civic courage and programs for young leaders**.
  "People should be less afraid. In Slovakia, people are afraid to present themselves openly because they fear for their jobs, their livelihoods; they

are dependent. Opportunities to make a living are limited, and that is why an open society is not developing. In Slovakia, an internal lack of freedom is still present."

- Creation of a **development strategy and support for civil society** and programs for its fulfillment.

Education for NGOs

- Accredited educational programs at the university level focused on the non-profit sector to bring new people to work in the NGO sector are still lacking. There are no academic certificates provided in the area of NGO management.

- **Research focused on NGOs and civil society** is also lacking. In Slovakia, unlike in surrounding countries, there is no academic base of research on civil society and NGOs. During discussions on the creation of legislation or funding for NGOs, neither the state nor NGOs had quality data from which to perform deep analyses. Both data and arguments on NGOs are lacking.

"We lack arguments to back up the usefulness of our work. In statistical research, things like the level of employment and the GDP are analyzed. At the beginning, there were also performance indicators. However, we were neither able to define them nor quantify them afterwards. In many activities it is impossible, but we are not doing it in areas where it is possible either."

Economic changes

Within the service sector, making NGOs equal with the public and business sectors requires completing fiscal decentralization at the regional level and a more frequent delegation of services for NGOs in line with the European model at both the municipal and state levels.

Proper mechanisms also have to be created for the sustainability of the third sector (involving the private and non-profit sectors), while an environment must emerge that encourages support for civil society from corporations and individuals.

Meanwhile, grant programs must be improved, as does access for NGOs to EU funds by cutting red tape. Programs must be launched for NGO support from public sources focused on institutional development, education and networking.

The state should continue in its efforts to eliminate regional differences. The economic environment influences opportunities for the people who live in it. The possibility of choice often supports civil courage and thereby influences the quality and level of civil society. Already today we can see large differences between the quality of society in Bratislava and outlying regions.

Legal changes
- To stabilize the legal environment. To create laws and norms in favor of independent initiatives. To have provisions for strengthening public participation reenacted in legislation.
- To improve the enforceability of the law, especially regarding race crimes, environmental crimes, and economic crimes.
- The various laws regulating the relationship between NGOs and the state should be changed after a thorough public debate.

Cultural changes
Several recommendations called for a change in culture, but this is a long-term issue. In Slovakia, as can be seen from research on values, there have been some changes in attitudes, but fundamental values have not changed.
- The state and its institutions should feel there is somebody above them (moral values, education) so they do not feel all-powerful. This higher power would secure continuity in the management of public affairs regardless of who formed the government.
- The ruling culture should change, and the state should perceive NGOs (and vice versa) as a critical friend. NGOs in the role of opponents and watchdogs should be an acceptable part of life. A culture of dialogue must be developed.

  "It would be ideal if the state accepted NGOs as partners and rid itself of animosity in its feelings towards NGOs. It would be great if the state accepted that NGOs belong here and do a good job, even though the state may not like this part of their role."

Other **challenges** confronting NGOs include:
- Reflecting on the dilemma that civil society is facing in Slovakia – whether to keep the activist ethos of civil society or to accept the gradual Europeanization of NGOs. In addition, NGOs should consider how they will bear up under the gradual decrease of the "American" civil society model in favor of the Europeanization of the third sector (linkage with the state and public sources).

"We are under pressure from regulations and finances. If we are lucky, we will end up with NGOs like in the UK or the Netherlands. If not, they will be similar to those in Austria or Germany. Within 10 years we adopted the American model where we supported grass-root activities. Today, the process of "Europeanization" is destroying this model. NGOs are being pushed into contracts, enabling them to survive. The majority of the country's 30,000 NGOs will end up as volunteer organizations, while only several hundred large organizations will work on a professional level, strengthened by their ability to gain EU funds and public resources. The advocacy role of Slovak NGOs was an attempt to import something from the outside, and it could never have worked. It was a nice try, but it couldn't have succeeded."

- To learn how to create new types of alliances, tactics, and strategies at a time when the attention of public is focused mainly on domestic issues.
- To promote a European dimension in NGO thinking and tackle issues of European importance and take joint responsibility for them as an integral unit.
- To know how to react to new challenges of the day, such as modern patriotism.

"Nationalism is not something I see only in Slovakia. It is visible in several EU countries. Even after EU accession, states are not immune to extreme nationalist topics in public or political life. NGOs appear to have misjudged the situation and do not know how to face it. Nationalism is a force that can reopen issues we considered closed, such as tolerance for other nations or minorities."

Reflections and recommendations

What did our respondents actually tell us? Clearly, they had a positive view of NGOs, probably due to their personal involvement in the field. Just as clearly, NGOs are not in themselves good or bad. However, those with experience of working for an NGO believe that it is a free environment in which they can realize themselves and find a deeper purpose in their work.

To understand the real importance of NGOs, it is necessary to look at what they do and what they contribute to society. However, evaluating this contribution in the case of NGOs is not simple. We lack the views of other people involved in social changes. On the other hand, efforts to measure the impact of NGO activities in the

economic terms of a cost-benefit analysis are inadequate and simplistic. This does not mean we should not try to examine the importance and role of NGOs in society, rather that we should find a better way to look at NGOs from the social or economic point of view.

When we look at the past, **two different interpretations** emerge from the 1989-2008 period regarding the role of NGOs. The first scheme – an interpretive one – states that thanks to the support of Western countries, especially American private foundations (but also US and EU public sources), it was possible to plant and husband a seed of civic participation and social capital in Slovakia, a process that NGOs contributed to as well. This seed is present within the collective experience of Slovak society. In times of need, when democracy was threatened and standards of civility and tolerance were trampled, it was activated. Compared with neighboring countries, it is clearly imprinted on the Slovak experience.

The second interpretation states that this seed did not – despite the support it received – leave a deeper imprint on the collective memory of Slovak citizens. Instead, it is overlapped by deeper motivations based on Slovak traditions, history and culture, which is conservative, respects authority, and remains "frightened" by bad experiences from the past during the implementation of new trends, etc. Attitudes and trends from Western Europe which developed over decades (i.e. the welfare state) are the closest to Slovak nature. Models of NGO operation in Western Europe are based on different assumptions than those in US. The Western European model was cultivated over a long period and was integrated into the public policies of these countries. It emphasizes social economy over the association of citizens. The integration processes of state bureaucracy and the gradual approximation of law and institutions in new EU member countries indirectly strengthen this model. It also presents a challenge for NGOs – how they react to it and whether and how they moderate or strengthen it.

Developments since 1998, but especially the events of the year 2007 in Slovakia indicate that the state perceives NGOs as public sector institutions. This is also supported by the trend toward stricter regulation and state control that was activated by a wave of anti-terrorist legislation and states trying to defend themselves against the threat of global terrorism. In their opposition to the state, activist NGOs tried to emphasize the civic and private character of NGO activities. Both the state and NGOs face a dilemma in how to deal with the character of private initiatives (presented by a civil initiative) for the public benefit. These initiatives exist, there are many of them, and it is hard to ignore them. But is it possible to present them as public sector initiatives? Can they be subjected to a public law?

It seems that in practice it is possible, and that it is done, especially in cases where such initiatives are financed exclusively from public money. In such cases, neither the state nor the public has a problem with accepting an increased level of regulation.

What to do with initiatives that exist outside of public funding? What space will they take up in future if the association of citizens is considered the domain of the public sector? Today, given the absence of basic socio-scientific and economic research on NGOs, we unfortunately know very little about NGO funding, which is another reason why this dilemma and the solutions to it are not based on facts. However, one thing is clear – this domain will be the scene of a struggle between activist NGOs and the state bureaucracy.

Since 2004, several discussions have taken place in the Slovak NGO environment on topics such as public fundraising, philanthropy, the 2% tax designation, and public funding support. These debates have gone in different directions on how the state should be engaged in solving these issues.

Within the issue of philanthropy, there are two basic lines – one is more liberal, and is inclined to support the involvement of private capital to achieve publicly beneficial goals without motivational mechanisms in the form of tax deductions. The second view admits the necessity of state intervention in the form of motivational mechanisms for private philanthropy, as well as of targeted intervention by the state in the form of grant programs. In Slovakia, the fact that individual philanthropy is relatively rare indicates that it is going to take a very long time to develop it. On the other hand, the behavior of the state and the trend towards greater state authority and paternalism does not augur well for intelligent support for NGOs from public sources. In the background of the discussion on philanthropy, voices are sporadically heard suggesting the elimination of the 2% tax designation mechanism, which is currently the only indirect state tool for supporting publicly beneficial projects initiated by citizens.

Another dilemma related to the aforementioned interpretation schemes is the future role of NGOs. Will they continue to fill the "white spots" in our society, or will they become primarily service providers for the state and municipalities by outsourcing some services? Will they be financially tied to the state?

Is the solution mentioned by several respondents, in which the state supports NGOs in their "mirror" role without taking away their independence, really feasible? The current situation indicates that neither the first nor the second situation will occur. NGOs will more likely keep their role of "mirror and amplifier", support-

ing it with their own financial resources, enthusiasm, passion, and volunteerism, with modest support from foreign countries and domestic philanthropy. But the main questions remain to be answered by NGOs themselves – where do they see themselves, and what are they prepared to do to achieve this?

Our interviews yielded several other practical recommendations for both the state and NGOs:

- o The need to create a research center which can study civil society and NGOs over the long term;
- o Grant programs from public sources should focus not only on helping NGOs to reach project goals, but also on supporting the institutional development of NGOs and building up their capacities, and at the same time eliminating the red tape connected with public and EU resources. It would also be a good idea to open up science and research grant policy to NGOs and think-tanks.
- o NGOs should focus more on communication and presentation of their work and on maintaining an open attitude towards their partners and the public.

Outcomes

- • People from the NGO environment regard NGOs especially through a prism of values, from a human and civil dimension, as well as in terms of freedom and independence. They especially appreciate the fact that through NGOs they can pursue their ideas, creativity and beliefs.
- • Key milestones in the development of NGOs include significant activities such as the S.O.S Third Sector Campaign, the establishment of the Gremium of the Third Sector, and the OK '98 Campaign. With the benefit of hindsight, another milestone was the influence of American foundations (including support from EU sources) during the 1990s, which developed the internal capacities of NGOs without bureaucracy, and without dictating their activities.
- • Even 10 years after the fall of Communism, the relationship between the state and NGOs remained deeply influenced by the political situation. The future direction that Slovakia will take is uncertain. NGOs were deeply involved in conflicts related to the creation of rules, democracy and the country's overall direction instead of "inhabiting" the public space and fulfilling their goals. Even today it is clear that NGOs are still trying to catch up with what they missed in their relationship with the state in the past.

- NGOs feel frustration because they are disconnected from society and often rejected by the state and its institutions. NGOs were not successful in persuading the state that they are a tool for the improvement of the lives of citizens. They have a problem with communication, with their own attitudes, and with sources of funding.

- For the future, NGOs see themselves as strengthening the three main roles in which they are involved today: 1) filling "white spots", including innovations and experimentation; 2) holding up a mirror to those in power and ensuring that the voice of marginalized groups is heard, and; 3) partner cooperation with the public and business sectors in providing services for citizens. It is not clear whether the state sees these three roles in the same light and whether it would not seek to limit NGOs to the role of service providers supported by public funds.

- It is also not clear how the discussion on the position of NGOs within the public or private sectors will end, and what the consequences will be for civic participation. There is a lack of consensus among the country's elites, which further hampers the search for agreement on the place of NGOs within Slovakia's legal and institutional environments. However, global challenges such as demographic change, terrorism and migration require such a consensus.

- NGOs need to have a clear idea of how to react to the gradual decline of the "American" approach to civic involvement, and how they will prepare for the gradual deepening of integration into the European Union. The latter process entails a significant increase in public funding in the form of contracts, the strengthening of larger organizations, an increase in bureaucracy, etc.

- In light of the above, NGOs must improve their communication with politicians and the public on what they offer, their activities and their contributions. It is also important that they explain why they are active in the public environment and why they provide certain services.

- NGOs still face a dilemma over whether they should seek public sources to carry out the aforementioned roles. If they do, then the mirror role at the very least is threatened by a loss of independence. But what are the other options?

- Public consultations remain a sensitive issue, despite the existence of consultation mechanisms. The state is not sufficiently pro-active in getting interested groups involved in consultation on changes, or in finding ways to accept the views of NGOs.

- A stable base of research on NGOs and civil society must be created over the long term. Basic data on NGOs is lacking, and without it, creating public policies towards NGOs is far more difficult.

- NGOs need free, unrestricted resources for their own development. The current shortage of finances for NGOs is hurting their capacity building and strategic development. It is not clear what role private philanthropy or public resources should play in the creation of these funds.

Summaries

International summary of research carried out in the Czech Republic

1. Fundamental approaches

The outcomes of interviews with NGO leaders and other opinion-makers from the civic movement conduced within this research revealed that in the Czech Republic there are several enormously varied, even **incompatible lines of thought** concerning the roles of NGOs. The opinions of respondents regarding NGO relationships to the national, regional and local governments break down into four fundamental approaches:

The first approach ("**group A**") comprises those who **favor strong cooperation with the state** and some organizations, providing services as demanded and contracted by government authorities. They assert that through coordination, lobbying and partly by doing the work of public officials, NGOs can generate substantial influence on the operation of the executive side of the state administration, and even to some extent on legislative processes.

The second approach ("**group B**") comprises for the most part **critics** who warn that partnerships with national and large local governments are often merely formal. These people disapprove of developing informal relations, and view them as containing the threat of clientelism. They believe that working together with the government should be a formalized, transparent and accountable process.

The third approach ("**group C**") prefers **initiating, controlling, expert and advisory roles** towards the government. To these people, the key role of NGOs is participating in designing local, regional and national public policies, both indirectly (though their own actions and according to their own priorities and strategies) or directly (by formulating requirements and introducing new themes).

The fourth approach ("**group D**") regards NGO roles in national governance as a secondary byproduct of their existence, given that the **fundamental roles of NGOs are defined in the concept of civil society** and not with regard to national or local governments. Roles in terms of national governance thus keep changing according to the given situation, i.e. whether and to what degree the state applies this concept in public governance processes.

2. Changing Roles of the Government

Most respondents agreed that NGOs had matured during the period examined, **from naive beginnings** marked by great social innovation, towards gradual **professionalism,** and the definition of relations with the state administration and local governments. Some stressed the importance of thematic umbrellas and regional platforms. At the same time, just as many respondents warned against such simplified perceptions of "development." Few identified any major turning points. Development was perceived as continuous, accompanied by "symptomatic events," while political changes were mentioned as turning points only indirectly. Most respondents identified several "eras", during which there had been significant shifts in the perception of NGOs by the various state authorities.

Some respondents perceived the overall **social and political climate as deteriorating** and gradually **turning away from support for NGO and civil society concepts**. According to these respondents, NGOs are being pressured into the only roles accepted by the government – as providers of services contracted by the state or as narrow interest groups and clubs (generally referred to as "mutual benefit societies"). This trend also includes repeated attempts to abolish or limit the right of NGOs to participate in public consultation proceedings.

Some respondents also claimed to feel **strong consumer and media pressure**, which is generally **unfavorable to NGO roles**, and which tends to tolerate at most public collections for children and the disabled. Such arguments were typical of respondents from groups B and C – those who see open and truly equal partnerships between NGOs and government institutions as the principle role of NGOs, and those who favor an "initiator" role for NGOs.

Other respondents, primarily from group A, **see and welcome the growing cooperation by some NGOs with central and regional authorities**, ascribing no great significance to the general changes in the state's approach to NGOs. According to this group, changes in the political direction of the government have little influence on cooperation with the NGO sector.

Group D respondents insisted that the current problems may hold the key to improving conditions for NGOs, which are the vehicles of activities independent of the government, meaning that their significance will increase no matter what the state does.

3. Optimism

A change in the situation of NGOs would require a significant shift in the views of one of the major political parties, in the roles of the government authorities, or in the lifestyles of a large part of society. The respondents saw all of the above as rather unlikely. Most saw the current situation as a **stalemate**, and foresaw no momentum or potential for change. At the same time, history has shown us that in such situations, unexpected shifts and catharses often occur.

Within the current situation, respondents saw no force powerful enough to break the passivity and disinterest in public affairs. However, most respondents were optimistic, saying that **NGOs still represent an environment where active and creative people can find a place and a voice**. Regardless of how the relationship between NGOs and the government authorities develops, some respondents remain convinced that significant social processes can be launched by the activism of small minorities. They therefore do not rule out that a totally unexpected change might take place, and even that it could come from abroad.

4. Duality

In terms of NGO activities, the respondents selected two areas. Groups A and B expected NGOs to increasingly integrate, to cooperate in networks, and to become increasingly more important partners for the government at all levels, ultimately implementing government policies. Groups C and D were worried that many NGOs are turning into highly bureaucratic instruments of the government, and losing their potential as the source of activity and social benefits. They said that NGOs are hard to distinguish from entities set up by the national, regional or local governments to implement public policies. According to them, the NGO sector is destined to split up. One large segment will comprise **organizations directly dependent on governments,** and the other activist organizations and other **NGOs capable of raising sufficient funding from other sources**, gaining independence from public funding and thus possibly maintaining some **independence of thought**.

International summary of research carried out in Hungary

The responses given by the NGO leaders interviewed during the research on the relationship between NGOs and the state in Hungary gave a diverse and contradictory picture, one full of challenges. Below is a brief summary of the findings.

The respondents named activities which aim to enhance the common good and achieve social goals as the most important characteristic of NGOs. They also mentioned their independence, the fact that they carry out self-organized activities and are voluntary, and their community-centered nature.

They said that the years that followed the sudden growth of the sector after 1989 were characterized by diversity, involving a considerable increase in government funds together with growing uncertainty about the sector's role. In the last six to seven years, NGOs have been more aware of negative trends. No significant or systematic change has occurred in the relationship between NGOs and the state; the state only reluctantly accepts the participation of NGOs in discussions of important social questions.

The most prominent NGOs roles towards the state were providing services and reviewing professional proposals. Several organizations reported that their work included a mix of cooperative and confrontational roles.

Every organization interviewed reported success in their relationship with the state. Their achievements can be classified into seven groups: a) participation in the preparation of legislation; b) changing the way legislation is enforced; c) participation in the development of government strategies and policies; d) the initiation of various bodies and procedures to formalize the input of NGOs; e) obtaining government subsidies to support innovative programs; f) the transformation of the way in which various fields are financed; and g) changing or preventing the execution of government decisions and plans.

NGOs achieved these successes by using both formal (official) and informal (non-official) channels of communication (such as personal contacts). Some NGOs, however, succeeded by using legal tools or by enabling their target groups to put pressure on the state. These NGOs were usually in contact with bodies related to both the preparation and making of decisions. Many factors closely connected to the work of NGOs affected their success in dealing with the state, including their reputation, credibility, professional aptitude, cooperation with other NGOs, media presence and international relations.

Successes in dealing with the state usually had a positive effect on the NGOs, bringing about greater public appreciation or the growth of the NGO.

According to the respondents, the ideal roles for NGOs in their relationship with the state can be classified into four main groups: i) *Professional, expert role* in which NGOs offer useful and tangible results to the state; ii) *Cooperative partnership*, when NGOs and the state cooperate according to the logic and opportunities of their own sector; iii) *Active participating role*, in which NGOs voice their views on issues concerning them either through their own initiative or by being invited; iv) *Interest representation, critical, monitoring role* to influence, convince and monitor state individuals and committees. Out of the four roles, the last is the most likely to lead to confrontation with the state.

Among the reasons preventing NGOs from taking on these ideal roles, the way the state operates (e.g. the lack of clear ideas on development strategies) and the NGOs' own daily struggle for survival were mentioned most often.

The people interviewed did not expect a significant change in the relationship between NGOs and the state in the near future.

As interviewers, we agree with much of the criticism of the state expressed in the answers regarding the current state of the relationship between NGOs and the state. We also feel that NGOs could do a lot to change this relationship. Therefore it is of outmost importance for NGOs, individually and together with other NGOs, to reflect on their relationship with the state, to re-think their roles based on this reflection, and to develop their strategies accordingly. Our recommendation for NGOs is that they take time out from their daily work and create an opportunity for such reflection.

Although improving their work through reflection is the primary responsibility of NGOs themselves, other actors concerned with the work of NGOs can also play an important role here. Donor practices must be reviewed to help grantees find the right balance between 'doing' and 'reflecting'; specific support must be provided for reflection in the framework of 'normal' grants.

As for specific topics for reflection, we felt NGOs should reflect on the following points: i) to what extent could a re-think of the underlying characteristics of the sector enable a more productive relationship with the state?; ii) to what extent could their work be described as political, and what kinds of relationships do they intend to build with political parties?; iii) what do they think about the state?; iv) how could they consciously design their roles with the state? In our opinion, the

growing cooperation between NGOs, and their efforts to develop a democratic and transparent relationship with the state, could help NGOs to make their relationship with the state more successful.

International summary of research carried out in Poland

Our analysis showed that the respondents had a rather idealized notion of the third sector as created by people united by common goals and missions. The fact that non-governmental organisations have the status of legal entities was seen as of minor importance. Two things were interesting: first, the analyses of the events considered to be 'giant steps' in the development of NGOs in Poland were quite superficial; second, they referred almost exclusively to facts that are widely known even to the average volunteer worker.

The study allowed the researchers to draw up a typology of the roles played by NGOs in relation to the state - the role of a provider of social services, the spokesman's role, the role of monitor of the public administration, and the expert (innovative) role. That the respondents were able to point out roles that can be classified within a specific typology shows that the third sector in Poland has finally been consolidated. Another crucial point made by those interviewed is the importance of the role of creating communities. On the one hand, this points to unfulfilled social needs, while on the other it highlights the belief of the sector's leaders that civic initiative in Poland needs strengthening. The most important role that should be played by NGOs is creating communities in society to encourage spontaneous, bottom-up civic initiatives in a state governed by the subsidiarity principle.

The analysis pointed to the lack of institutionalized forms of civic dialogue in Poland. While over the past few years attempts have been made to implement such a dialogue, the third sector's leaders still believe that only individual contacts and informal lobbying can bring the desired effects. According to the respondents, the surface nature of social consultations only confirms this view. Our analysis of the collected material shows that the sector's leaders have failed to grasp the true meaning of the consultation process, and wrongly assume that their opinions should always be taken into account.

As regards the factors inhibiting inter-sectoral relations, the research allowed us not only to classify factors that were already known, but also to identify new ones that are equally important. Over many years, the lack of confidence between the social partners and the centralization and bureaucratization of public administration have been a problem. Other difficulties include the lack of continuity in funding, the uncertain employment prospects in the third sector, and high staff turnover. The research also identified a problem in the polarization and the increasingly oligarchical nature of the third sector in Poland, of the transformation of large

NGOs into 'grant-hunters' (now that EU structural funds have become available), and of the belief, deeply rooted in public opinion, that working in the third sector is not profitable.

Our analysis of the research results also pointed to another serious problem. The third sector in Poland lacks an image of itself, and the self-awareness of its leaders is rather limited. One respondent gave a reason for this state of affairs: at the time when the third sector was developing in Poland there was no conflict between society and the authorities (i.e. between NGOs and the public administration). Such a conflict would have helped to clarify positions, establish an identity for NGOs, and define mutual relations.

When talking about inter-sectoral relations, the respondents more often mentioned the factors inhibiting the public administration than those limiting NGOs. The few who 'beat their breasts' admitted that NGOs still cannot be treated as professional partners for public institutions, that they tend to look after their own affairs, are unable to cooperate to achieve common goals in criticizing the state's policy, fail to put forward concrete solutions, are dependent on public funds, have become commercialized, and are unable to overcome the over-representation of big NGOs based in Warsaw.

Certainly not all problems described in the report can be overcome – for instance, the lack of financial sustainability of nonprofit organizations is to a great extent just how the nonprofit sector works. NGOs will always be 'recipients' and will have to accept the inconveniences that result from it. Apart from this, the nonprofit sector in Poland is still developing, and in the long term it has to develop stability and independence. Access to European structural funds will not provide these qualities, as they cannot be used to develop capital.

Surely, however, some of the problems described in this report can be solved. In order to do that, the nonprofit sector should undertake two kinds of activities. First, NGOs should publish examples of good practices in intra-sectoral cooperation. Good practices include effective and transparent relations with public administration institutions at the central, regional and local levels, based on institutionalized forms of dialogue. This could strengthen the third sector position, because thanks to the transparency and predictability of the activities undertaken, decision-makers will understand that NGOs can constitute healthy competition but do not pose a threat to the sphere managed by public administration. The structural admittance of NGOs to cooperation is a natural phase in the development from *welfare state* to *welfare society* in Western European countries. The popularization and imitation of good practices will be an opportunity for NGOs to find

a place in intra-sectoral relations, which, in consequence, will reduce the problem of self-awareness among the sector's leaders and the lack of trust between NGOs and public administration. The basis for the creation of clear relations is mutual trust between the partners and the conviction that NGOs and public institutions are co-existent and even inter-dependent entities. Second, NGOs should unite and create federations that represent their common interests – only a strong partner is an equal partner. It is worth imitating the German example, where almost every NGO belongs to an umbrella organization or a federation, whose representatives create networks of individuals responsible for particular issues. The basis of federalization should, however, be honesty and acceptance of the notion that umbrella bodies will only represent truly common interests. The consolidation of the nonprofit environment based on these principles will also counteract the polarization and increasingly oligarchical nature of the sector.

To create clear relations during federalization, it is crucial that the representative functions of umbrella organizations be separated from the functions of supporting infrastructure. The transparent financing of infrastructure organizations is also important to avoid conflicts of interest between them and their beneficiaries (such as in cases where they are applying for the same grants).

International summary of research carried out in Slovakia

The research conducted in Slovakia offers a rich and sometimes contradictory picture of how NGOs see themselves, how they see their contributions to the nation's governance so far, and how they see their future roles. Some elements of this picture are clear and some are fuzzy and inconsistent and need further reflection.

There are two ways in which the concept of an 'NGO' is perceived. One emphasizes the civic and individual dimension, and frames the NGO concept as a space where individuals can freely use their ideas, skills, creativity, values and beliefs to complement the state and the marketplace. The other view sees NGOs as formalized structures, instruments with legal subjectivity and the ability to gather resources for active citizens to act in the public domain.

The key milestones of NGO evolution in Slovakia include the formation of the Gremium of the Third Sector, a infrastructure body, as well as the S.O.S. Third Sector campaign against an illiberal law on foundations during the Meciar government, and a get-out-the-vote campaign called OK 98. Another important milestone was the activity of foreign private foundations, mostly US-based, which allowed for the growth of internal NGO capacities with a minimum of interference or bureaucracy.

In terms of the strategic contributions of NGOs to national governance, respondents cited major public mobilization campaigns that influenced the direction of the country, as well as NGO contributions to the development of a strategic legal framework friendly to people's involvement in public affairs (such as the freedom of information act). They also highlighted changes in social awareness such as the gradual acceptance of Slovakia's international role or the acceptance of voluntary engagement for the public benefit.

NGOs used a number of instruments to achieve their goals, ranging from direct protests to participation in decision-making bodies and expert work. All of these tools contributed to a better and deeper public discussion, one that otherwise would not have taken place. However, there is a universal feeling of discontent with the way how the state and local governments approach the issue of public consultations. Respondents said that public consultations are useful and necessary, but complain that the state is often passive or reluctant to meet its obligations in this area.

The relationship between the state and NGOs has been marked by domestic politics since the early 1990s. Due partly to this fact, even in 1998 – 10 years after the fall of Communism, the future of Slovakia unlike its V4 neighbors was unclear, and

NGOs were involved in the struggle over the democratic rules and the European orientation of the country. The state-NGO relationship has been playing catch-up until now, and contains a spectrum of different relationships ranging from ignorance, dependence, asymmetry and animosity to respect and equality.

Regarding the position of NGOs in society, NGOs are frustrated that they are not more integrated with society, and with the fact that the state does not seem to accept them. Other respondents said that NGOs were unable to persuade public sector institutions that they are good and effective instruments for improving the quality of life of citizens, and that the public sector and NGOs should cooperate more effectively. Surprisingly, respondents active in the provision of social services shared this opinion as well, as did advocacy and watchdog NGOs.

NGOs see in future a deepening and overlapping of their three major roles: 1) filling in 'white spots' left by the state and the business sectors, including with pilot projects and social innovation, 2) watchdog roles, mirroring those in power, and giving a voice to marginalized groups, and 3) partner cooperation with the public and private sectors in improving the life of citizens. It is not clear whether the state sees these roles in the same light, or whether it will try to mould NGOs into service provision and public funding. So far there have been some tendencies in this direction, but the state has not formed a coherent policy towards civil society or integrated it into government policies.

Domestic politics will remain a factor in the relationship between the state and NGOs. Trends towards populism, state centralization, forced patriotism and revived xenophobia and nationalism are good reasons for not ignoring domestic politics as a factor in this relationship in the future.

Other important barriers include insufficient domestic funding and its gradual dominance by the corporate sector, the stagnating role of public funding, and the controversial role of EU structural funds.

The lack of consensus among the political and social elites is also complicating efforts by NGOs to identify their place in Slovakia's legal and institutional environment, especially in regard to the global challenges that Slovakia faces (demographic trends, terrorism, migration). It is also not clear how the NGO sector will be defined in the law – as private sector or public sector entities. At the moment, the tendency is to consider NGOs public sector bodies and to organize their legal and fiscal regimes accordingly.

Internal NGO barriers include insufficient communication with the public, compe-

tition among NGOs, and a shortage of staff and resources that are being further drained by increased red tape in the use of public funding, including EU funds. NGOs also have to increase their professionalism, which at the same time increases the presence of the managerial culture and reduces the non-profit ethos.

NGOs need to clarify for themselves how they intend to respond to the gradual disappearance of the 'US' variety of civic engagement in the public domain and how to prepare for EU integration processes that are resulting in increased public funding in terms of services, a strengthening of large NGOs, a weakening of small NGOs, and an increase in bureaucracy.

In the light of all of this, NGOs need to communicate more closely with politicians and the public about their work for society, the contributions they make, and the reasons why they engage in the public domain or provide services to citizens.

How NGOs should position themselves for receiving public funding in all three roles (innovation, watchdog and partnership) remains a dilemma, given that in at least one of them (the watchdog role) public funds may reduce the independence of NGOs vis-à-vis the government. But what are the options?

Additional needs for the next five years to boost the activity of NGOs in these roles include:

- The establishment of a stable NGO and civil society research base with a long-term outlook. Basic data on NGOs are missing, preventing responsible public policy-making in this field;
- The establishment of an accredited educational program for non-profit volunteers, staff, and board members;
- Free, flexible and empowering funding for NGOs. The existing funding environment stresses rigid frameworks and does not stimulate capacity-building and the taking of strategic attitudes by NGOs. Existing public funding channels have to be modified to respond to this need. Private philanthropy is not visible in this context, while most corporate philanthropy focuses on pragmatic win-win programs (socially relevant causes that bring media visibility and promote the corporate image);
- A strengthening of global and civic education in the educational system, adding a European perspective;
- Learning and experimenting with new types of alliances, tactics, and strategies to address the recent wave of nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance to minorities;
- Addressing global and pan-European issues at a time when the attention of the public is focused on domestic politics.

Conclusion

This publication has offered the results of studies carried out in the countries of the Visegrad Four alliance (the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia), as well short summaries of each country's research. At the end of this book we wanted to take one more step back, and to look at the outcomes from a greater distance and within a wider context. We also wanted to raise a few more questions.

Despite their many similarities, the four studies reveal that even these relatively close nations have undergone quite different processes since 1989. Some relate to political processes and constellations, others are of historical relevance. Our respondents agreed that to a great extent, the relationships between NGOs and the state (national, regional and local governments) is very illustrative of how people feel and how they relate to the authorities, i.e. of the overall "state of mind" in society. It is clear that we are **just as much the same as we are different,** and that our differences were not created after 1989 but have much deeper roots. If nothing else, this means that we have a great deal to learn from one another.

In this respect it is very interesting to follow the similarities, because some of them turn out to be inherently systemic rather than situational. We are referring here principally to the self-identification of NGOs. All four studies depict national NGO sectors that are very diverse and full of internal contradictions – to the point where its identity should be reconsidered, for it makes little sense as it is. It is quite amazing how little common understanding there is, and how little NGOs in all four countries think about their roles and their potential roles towards the state. Nor do the authorities understand themselves any better, and nor do they reflect on NGO roles with any interest beyond the purely utilitarian. Nonetheless, it is clear from all four studies that the **concept of civic activities is directly linked to the civil society concept**, constituting the blood that runs through the veins of the modern state. Having said this, it is crucial that such activities have an institutionalized format - rich and varied legal entities defining themselves as independent of the state and of the intent to maximize profit. **Ensuring that this concept remains valid, respected and widely understood is of key importance**.

Another similarity is that all four studies reflect the fact that their NGO sector was reborn in the early 1990s with some continuity and some historical burdens, but also with great enthusiasm. These wild beginnings were gradually followed by a period of sobering up, differentiation, capacity building, professionalism, networking etc. No respondents saw any long-term balance in this state of affairs: descriptions reveal **either highly dynamic states or lasting states that are perceived**

as deterioration. Given that the lack of civic dialogue was also identified as a key shared issue, this finding deserves further examination, as it points to the nature of public discussion in the region, to the role of consensus and leadership, and to the significance of catharsis. All of these themes are very closely linked to NGOs and their roles – both towards the authorities as well as in society.

At the same time, most respondents identified with one underlying thought – that while their authenticity gives them credibility, it is also responsible for the divergent tendencies. We believe that these four studies have showed very clearly that it is precisely this **combination of authenticity, rich diversity and respect that we need to complete in order to see the whole picture**. And what else does *cultivation* mean besides this?

Attachments

Attachment 1: RESPONDENTS in Czech republic

(We include roles in which they are best known and recognized, regardless of whether or not they currently play them)

Martin Ander, Environmental activist, Director of the Hnutí Duha, Brno

Petr Anderle, Cultural activist, Chairman of the Vlastenecký poutník civic association, Bruntál

Jiří Bárta, Director of the VIA Foundation, Prague

Pavla Baxová, Director of social services NGO provider Rytmus, Prague

Jan Beránek, Environmental activist, founder of the Hnutí Duha, former chairman of the Green party, currently working with Greenpeace

Petra Burčíková, Human rights activist, director of La Strada o.p.s., Prague

Milena Černá, Director of the Výbor dobré vůle - Olga Havlová Foundation, Prague

Zuzana Drhová, Environmental activist, Zelený Kruh, Prague

Terezie Hradilková, Representative of social services NGO provider Společnost pro ranou péči, Prague

Blažena Hušková, Member of the MA 21 working group of the Government Council of the Czech Republic for Sustainable Development

Zdeněk Jakubka, Director of the environmental civic association Vita Ostrava

Jiří Ježek, Director of the NGO training civic association AGNES, Prague

Ivo Kačaba, Member of the Government Council for Coordinating Drug Prevention Policies

Marie Kopecká, Director of the Open Society Fund, Prague

Alena Králíková, Lawyer of the Poradna pro uprchlíky civic association, director of Gender studies, currently in the Slovak-Czech Women´s Fund, Prague

Tomáš Krejčí, Director of the Community Foundation of Euroregion Labe, Ústí nad Labem

Jan Kostečka, Director of the social services NGO provider Proutek, Plasná u Jindřichova Hradce

Jan Korytář, Environmental activist, founder of the Společnost přátel přírody, Liberec, member of the international organization Ashoka

Miroslav Kundrata, Director of the Partnerství Foundation, Brno

Jana Ledvinová, Trainer and consultant of The Resource Alliance, chairwomen of

the Czech Fundraising Center, member of the board of the Tereza association for environmental education

David Matýsek, Streetworker, formerly director of the Klub Hurá kamarád civic association, Pardubice

Martin Nawrath, Consultant for environmental and community development organization, mediator, Brno

Šimon Pánek, Director of the humanitarian orgnaization Člověk v tísni, o.p.s., Praha

Jan Piňos, Environmental activist, campaign leader of Greenpeace, formerly director of the Broumovsko Natural Preserve Administration Unit

Miroslav Pospíšil, Director of the research organization Centrum výzkumu neziskového sektoru, Brno

Martin Skalský, Environmental, transport and community development activist working with Arnika, Prague

Miroslav Svoboda, Director of social services NGO provider Exodus, Třemošná u Plzně

Hana Šilhanová, Director of the Nadace pro rozvoj občanské společnosti Foundation, Praha

Přemysl Vacek, Member of the Svaz českých komínářů civic association, professional musician and interpret of medieval music

Michal Zahradník, Director of social services NGO provider Šance pro tebe, Chrudim

Attachment 2: RESPONDENTS in Hungary

Ferenc Bárdos, Életfa Environmental Society

Balázs Dénes, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU)

András F. Tóth, National Volunteer Centre

Sándor Fülöp, Enviromental Management and Law Association (EMLA)

Balázs Gerencsér and Judit Oprics, Nonprofit Information and Training Centre Foundation (NIOK)

Péter Giczey, Életfa Help Service Association

Irén Groskáné Piránszki, Eastern-Hungarian Community Service Foundation

Zsolt Horváth, Clean Air Action Group

Benedek Jávor, Vedegylet

Juhász Géza, ex Habeas Corpus Workgroup

Bence Kovács, Independent Ecological Centre (FÖK)

András Krémer, National Association for Mediation

János László, Cycling Club of Hungary

Izabella Márton, Alliance of Social Professionals (3SZ)

Kinga Milankovics, Regina Foundation

Vera Móra, Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation

Péter Nizák, Soros Foundation

Péter Peták, Istenkúti Community Association

Ferenc Péterfi, Nyírpalota Society

Júlia Spronz, Patent Association, ex Habeas Corpus Workgroup

Ákos Topolánszky, Alliance of Hungarian Drug Therapy Institutions (MADRISZ)

Tibor Várady, Residents in Action in Terézváros (Our dear market)

Endre Varga, Publicly Beneficial Association for the Civic Network in Veszprem County

Ilona Vercseg, Hungarian Association for Community Development

Péterné Zalabai, Motivacio Foundation

Attachment 3: RESPONDENTS in Poland

Mieczysław Augustyn, the senator, Wielkopolski Bank Żywności

Jerzy Boczoń, the Foundation for the Regional Centre for Information and Support of NGOs

Urszula Burkot, the Polish Ecological Club

Marcin Dadel, the Centre for Civic Initiatives

Robert Drogoś, the RAFT Association

the Reverend **Jacek Dziel**, Caritas, the Archidiocese of Gniezno

Piotr Frączak, the Civil Society Development Foundation

Grzegorz Gruca, the Polish Humanitarian Organisation

Jan Herbst, the KLON/JAWOR Association

Teresa Hernik, the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association

Maria Holzer, the Polish Children and Youth Foundation

dr **Andrzej Juros**, the Catholic University of Lublin

dr **Andrzej Kassenberg**, the Institute for Sustainable Development

Ewa Kulik-Bielińska, the Stefan Batory Foundation

Jacek Kwiatkowski, the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy

Marzena Mendza-Drozd, the Civic Dialogue Association

Witold Monkiewicz, the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy

Alicja Pacewicz, the Foundation Centre for Citizenship Education

Piotr Pawłowski, the Association of Friends for Integration

Marek Piasecki, the Fuga Mundi Foundation

Piotr Rymarowicz, the Foundation for the Support of Ecological

Initiatives

Tomasz Schimanek, the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland

Rafał Serafin, the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation

the Reverend **Stanisław Słowik**, Caritas, the Diocese of Kielce

Krzysztof Smolnicki, the Lower Silesian Foundation for Sustainable Development

Piotr Szczepański, the Rural Development Foundation

Anna Szelest, the Association of Support for Non governmental Organisations "BRIDGE"

Zbigniew Wejcman, the Support Office for the Movement of Social Initiatives

Jan Jakub Wygnański, the Association for the Non governmental Initiatives Forum

Jan Żukowski, the Association of Sports Unions of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship

Attachment 4: RESPONDENTS in Slovakia

Marek Adamov, director, *Truc Spherique* – an open platform linking contemporary arts with social development, Žilina

Juraj Barát, general secretary of *the Slovak Catholic Charity*, director of *the Nitra Diocese Charity*

Norbert Brázda, director of the internet daily for the civil society - *Changenet*, Trenčín

Laco Briestenský, consultant of organizational development, lawyer, mediator, till 2006 director of *the Slovak Performing and Mechanical Rights Society* and till 1998 chief of municipality in Pezinok, Hlohovec

Martin Bútora, sociologist, Honorary President of *the Institute for Public Affairs*, Ambassador of Slovak republic to USA in 1999 - 2003, Bratislava

Eva Čobejová, journalist, *.týždeň*, Bratislava

Pavol Demeš, foreign-policy expert, co-founder of *the Gremmium of the third sector and the Slovak Academic and Information Agency – Servis Center for the Third Sector*, director of the office of *German Marshall Fund-US for Central and Eastern Europe*, Bratislava

Viera Dubačová, actress and director of Community Theater, director of *Divadlo z pasáže n.o.,* Banská Bystrica

Štefan Hajdu, writer, director of the community organization *o.z. Fundament*, Rimavská Sobota

Peter Haňdiak, attorney, legal expert for *1st Slovak Non-profit Service Center*, member of the Legislative Committee of the Slovak Government since 2007-through today, Bratislava

Roman Havlíček, environmentalist, *Friends of the Earth Slovakia*, member of independent monitoring team for EU funds, Banská Bystrica

Beata Hirt, director of *the Community Foundation Healthy City*, Banská Bystrica

Mikuláš Huba, environmentalist, geographer, employee of the Geographic Department of *the Slovak Academy of Sciences*, university professor, chairman of *Society for Sustainable Living*, Bratislava

Danica Hullová, director, *Education Center for Non-Profit Organizations*, formerly *SAIA-SCTS*, Banská Bystrica

Vladimír Michal, bookseller, *Artforum*, member of the Board of *Ekopolis Foundation*, Bratislava

Boris Klohna, chairman, *Association of Handicapped ZOM* Prešov

Jana Kviečinská, human rights expert, *Institute for Modern Slovakia* (affiliated with

Slovak Democratic-Christian Union – Democratic Party), long-term employee of *the Milan Šimečka Foundation*, General Director of The Section for Human Rights and Minorities at the Office of the Government in 2000-2006, Bratislava

Ľubica Lachká, statutory, *Nitra Community Foundation*, long-term director of *SAIA-Servis Center for the Third Sector*, Nitra

Iveta Liberková, director, *Society of Goodwill People*, Košice

Juraj Lukáč, environmentalist, *Lesoochranárske združenie VLK*, Osadné

Juraj Mesík, activist, expert of the *World Bank* for the area of Community Driven Development, Washington D.C., Initiator of *the Community Foundation Healthy City Banská Bystrica*

Zuzana Mistríková, media expert, *Media Institute.,* general director of the Section of Media and Audiovision at *the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak republic* during 2003-2006, Bratislava

Myrtil Nagy, director, *Information Center at Forum Institute,* Šamorín

Dušan Ondrušek, psychologist, consultant, since 1994 director of *Partners for Democratic Change, Slovakia*, Bratislava

Alena Pániková, director *Open Society Foundation*, Bratislava

Kálman Petőcz, polital scientist, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the UN in Geneva 1999-2006, *Fórum Inštitút*, Šamorín

Andrej Salner, analyst, economist, *Slovak Governance Institute*, Bratislava

Apolónia Sejková, consultant for EU funds, activist of Mother Center, Prešov

Andrej Steiner, consultant in the area of regional development, director, *Carpathian Institute*, Košice

Štefan Szabó, environmentalist, *SOSNA Foundation*, Košice

Sona Szomolányi, political scientist, university professor, *Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University*, Bratislava

Lajos Tuba, project manager, *Fórum Inštitút*, Šamorín

Filip Vagač, director, *Ashoka Central Europe*, for a long-term director and member of the board at *the Children of Slovakia Foundation*, Bratislava

Helena Woleková, sociologist, statutory representative of *Socia Foundation*, Minister of Labor, Social affairs and Family during 1991-1992, Bratislava

Pavol Žilinčík, lawyer, *o.z. Via Iuris – Center for Public Advocacy,* Banská Bystrica

Attachment 5: Typological summary: direct answers to questions in the research design

What roles did national governance NGOs play in the past, what roles do they play now, and why?

Without a doubt, the participation of NGOs in national governance has been positive in a wide array of roles, ranging from less to more extensive in accordance with the shifting social and political situation:

Direct complex role
- o participated in the overall social ethos during the transitional years of the early 1990s (approximately until 2004);
- o to participate in scripting partial and strategic documents for ministries and large local governments;

Indirect complex role
- o people who have worked with NGOs often move into local and national politics;
- o influence politics through their personal contacts, particularly in the social and humanitarian fields;

Partial direct public policy role
- o forming an authentic mission is a positive impulse both in developing local public policy, as well as in debate on the formation of public policy (a number of examples);
- o failure to prevent the development of controversial political perspectives (the issue of Klaus' attitude), thereby reducing the benefits associated with NGOs by being perceived as para-political entities (illegitimate and undemocratic);

Partial direct legislative role
- o often standing up for or against amendments to legislation affecting their area of interest– at least sometimes or partially successful;
- o providing expert feedback in the drafting of legislation;

Partial direct role in the executive area
- o participation in consultation processes, particularly in administrative proceedings, often as a key stakeholder;

o   participation in drafting strategic zoning documents, master plans and land-use development plans;

o   participation in community planning in social care;

Partial direct role in monitoring adherence to the rules by the authorities (and investors)

o   participation in monitoring some themes, sometimes with success;

o   participation in monitoring some specific cases, sometimes with success.

What strategic roles do NGOs want to play in national governance?

External circumstances and environment

o   Some NGOs see themselves as a form of activity which helps to change the external circumstances, and that this role is becoming ever more important. They try not to let the external conditions set by the government stop them from playing this role.

o   Some NGOs perceive themselves as a form of activity which is based on close cooperation with the government. They try to influence external circumstances so that this cooperation is as close as possible.

o   Many NGOs do not identify themselves with either view, combining them both.

Internal capacity

o   Some NGOs focus on flexibility, on being able to respond to a concrete situation, which requires well-educated staff capable of performing various tasks;

o   Some NGOs focus on the same principles as any other structured entity that specializes in one activity. They focus on high specialization of staff in individual positions as required by their partnerships and cooperation with government institutions and agencies at all levels;

o   Many NGOs do not identify themselves with either view, combining them both.

Working with other stakeholders

o   Some NGOs prefer to set up umbrella structures on the basis of geography (by region) and theme (nationwide according to the focus of

activity) to support a coordinated approach to both regional and national governments, sometimes developing a united representation towards government authorities;

o   Some NGOs feel that too much organization and unity within the NGO sector is a threat, reducing the significance of NGOs;

o   Many NGOs do not identify themselves with either of the two perceptions, combining them both.

Attachment 6: Timeline of NGO development in Slovakia

I. November 1989, the common state and its disintegration (1989-1992). November 1989 saw a sudden change in the laws governing the association of citizens. In Slovakia, a modern third sector started to come into existence in an environment without a tradition of such an entity. For Slovak society, this period meant the creation of space for the existence of NGOs through legislation. Thanks to these laws, civic initiatives were able to institutionalize themselves, while people came to understand that they could unite to solve specific problems. That is why many respondents chose the 1990 law on association of citizens as a crucial milestone[22]; another source of inspiration was the opening of the country's borders.

II. Growth of NGOs (1992-1994). After 1992, NGOs began to make their presence felt by establishing forums, conferences (the Stupava Conference, the Gremium of the Third Sector) and specialized infrastructure organizations providing support for non-profit organizations (i.e. the Slovak Academic Information Agency - Service Center for the Third Sector). Educational events and information exchanges also strengthened newly established NGOs. Many respondents saw the increasing presence of US and EU private foundations that supplied independent funding as a milestone of this time period.

III. Reaction to the return of authoritarianism (1994-1998). During the third government of authoritarian leader Vladimír Mečiar, there were confrontations between the government and NGOs. The S.O.S. Third Sector campaign, in which NGOs reacted to the draft law on foundations, was the most visible milestone for the respondents. For NGOs, this was a period during which they *"strengthened their advocacy muscles".* On the other hand, several NGO leaders saw negative sides of this development, in that it did not allow NGOs to do what they had been established for – protecting the environment or providing social services. Instead, they had to defend democracy. In Slovakia, public policy significantly interfered with NGOs and society. During these years, feelings of solidarity and cohesion among NGOs prevailed, and seemed to be leading to something. The mobilization potential that existed expressed itself fully in an 84% turnout in 1998 elections.

IV. Campaigns, definition of relationships with the state (1998-2004). The year 1998 was a turning point for NGOs due to the large mobilization wave caused by the OK 98 campaign before the elections, by which NGOs contributed to the

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22 Currently a conflict is raging between the government and NGO activists over this law. The government of Robert Fico has suggested canceling it and instead passing a new law on societes.

high election turnout and the change in government. After this came a period of sometimes bitter experiences of cooperative relationships with the state in helping to modernize Slovak democracy (decentralization, the info-law, the law on the civilian service, the referendum on EU accession, etc.). Many people did not like these new connections between the state and NGOs, and considered them inappropriate. Several respondents considered laws related to the operation and funding of NGOs as important in this period (e.g. the law on foundations, the law on the 1% and later the 2% tax designation, the income tax reform, and the debates that accompanied these measures). At the end of this period, a gradual dismantling of third sector structures (e.g. the Gremium) took place. This period also was a time in which NGOs themselves clarified their missions.

V. EU accession (2004-2006). For NGOs in Slovakia, EU accession confirmed the trend towards Europeanization in terms of an inclination towards public sources and the forming of relationships between the state and NGOs along the lines seen in the EU. In this period, foreign donors completed their withdrawal from the country. No system of funding from public sources was established, causing uncertainty to NGOs active in providing services. Even though new opportunities arose – especially from public (EU) funds – access to these funds was and remains very difficult; small organizations have almost no chance of drawing from them. The fact that NGOs ceased being recipients of support but instead became providers of help outside Slovakia was also a milestone of this period. A growth of corporate foundations followed a law allowing legal entities to assign 2% of their taxes to publicly beneficial purposes. This changed environment forced NGOs to be more professional, to provide services, and to develop relationships with businesses and the public sector, which according to some representatives led to a loss of enthusiasm and the volunteer ethos.

VI. The Robert Fico government (2006 – 2008). The start of the Fico administration was yet another milestone for NGOs in the sense that the role of the state has been greatly strengthened. While the confrontation has not been as dramatic as it was from 1994-1998, the relationship between the state and NGOs has deteriorated. On the other hand, NGOs remain present and included in the public discourse. Voices from within the NGO sector are also calling attention to the individualism, the absence of cooperation, and mistrust among NGOs.