



## Lessons from an exchange

Via Foundation, Czechia -

Trag Foundation, Serbia

December 2022

*Below are extracts from a report following a visit to the Trag Foundation in Belgrade by staff from the Via Foundation, Czechia.*

### Key learnings

#### Supporting the development of new community foundations

Trag has a very well-developed strategy how to encourage and support local informal groups to establish the community foundations. These processes might be easily transferable to the different context of the Czech Republic. The process takes about two years, with an open call at the beginning, targeting smaller cities and regions (more than fifty thousand and less than half a million residents). Based on the application form and interviews with applicants, four entities are selected to work with further, taking courses in fundraising and capacity-building, as well as mentoring and consultation, which lasts for four years. In the first phase, they must raise at least EUR 3 000 themselves. From this, they can distribute the first micro-grants (up to 500 euros) to the community. At that point, Trag acts as the backbone organisation for the administration of all the processes associated with small grants. At the end, they must then raise a minimum of €20,000 over two years to be able to establish the new Community Foundation. In this process Trag also serves as the support organisation.

#### Supporting advocacy

Local foundations have a big impact on local initiatives. Advocacy campaigns can lead to deeper community development, and it is advisable to work with the newly built energy for further development. Key topics for support in advocacy campaigns are urban planning and financial support for consultations with lawyers.

Trag also supports institutions that want to change national policies, unlike Via Foundation which is focused on local initiatives. The foundation provides them with basic training in advocacy methods and teaches them how to include citizens into the process, how to write recommendations for policy makers or how to communicate their mission to media, government and people. The offer of advocacy training before final applications makes the process more effective. Research is a key part of advocacy activities and cooperation with young researchers is a big help. It is vital for advocacy movements to be able to pay their team - it is advisable to have a bigger percentage of the budget for personal costs. Support for advocacy includes financial support; capacity building; research on policy level; advanced training on how to write specific recommendation (policy briefs) and how to deliver them to the authorities; trainings;

consultations; support around communications.

### **Approach to grant making**

Multi-round process during which supported projects are selected - internal selection from all projects that send only a concept note, 20 selected ones will undergo online training on community mapping (including ABCD methodology), activities planning, project development). Only after this online training do applicants submit their final applications, from which the ten winning applications are selected.

### **Platform to connect supported initiatives and organisations**

Trag showed us a good way to work with supported initiatives and organisations. Via Foundation has been thinking recently about an alumni platform for grantees, which would enable them to learn from each other, share know-how, tips for useful events or interesting written sources. The Trag Platform that connects representatives from all supported organisations and initiatives will definitely be an inspiration. The so called “activist committee” which allows a participatory approach to selecting organisations to support is also an interesting concept, as is Trag’s focus on capacity building for ensuring sustainability of the supported initiatives.

## **Personal reflections**

**Václav:** It was great to have the opportunity to meet in person representatives of a foreign foundation who work in a different context, but nevertheless deal with similar issues and address similar challenges in relation to the grantees. The most interesting thing for me was to get more insight into the processes and structure of the different programs of Trag. I find very inspiring the practice where calls for each program are multi-round and already during these individual rounds applicants receive non-grant support (such as seminars) - even before they submit their final applications. This is a practice that would be worth transferring to the Via Foundation's practice.

**Klára:** Although Trag foundation is quite similar like Via foundation, it was interesting for me to see their different approach to the grant process. I’m thinking of including some of their good practice in our work. Inspiring were also the presentations of topics, which are new for us, such as support for local green businesses. And at last learning about the Serbian context, which is a bit different from our country.

**Michaela:** It was inspirational to see another foundation’s approach to similar topics and challenges. Especially their focus on capacity building had a huge impact on me, as had their individual approach to grantees, focus on the project’s impact and their work with newly institutionalized local foundations. We will surely try to implement some of our findings into our work at Via Foundation - ensuring that the supported projects and organisations are more sustainable and are able to have a big impact thanks to mentoring, training and individual care.

**Nevena:** “From the last time Vaclav and I spoke about MEL (June, 2022) they really got their measurement worked out. Up then we noted that measurement shouldn't only ask if each project has reached its goal, rather every project from the perspective of our foundations should lead to the development of civic behavior in communities. Via really took steps toward such measurement. Two things amazed me the most. Firstly, they cooperated on a simple tool with a university professor (who we actually met in

Budapest - Lenka Duskova), Secondly, they came up with a pre-grant and post-grant design. Three simple questions before and after the project implementation allows Via to conclude they supported the development of civic behavior in communities. Specifically, if the project has broadened the pool of volunteers or members for the group, if the group has fundraised additional funds for the project, or if members of the group have made some cross-sectoral connections which would accelerate the development of their community. At the beginning of 2023 Trag will follow this line of thought to develop similar measurements. So, great job Vaclav and the team.”

**Vjekoslav:** “Since I've been in the Trag foundation, I often heard about Nadace Via. We used Via models, experience, and approaches with communities, ecosystems, philanthropy, fundraising, and more. We mixed that with our programs, experience, and local and regional context. Now we have different projects and activities which make our work more effective. And I'm very happy to show recipes for programs that also contain VIA spice. And that we can exchange our recipes with each other for work with communities and a better understanding of society. For example, through the "Our local foundation - community has a say!" program with a long-term goal to encourage and support the establishment of community foundations and the community foundation movement in the Western Balkans region, we offer a unique experience with ingredients such as local philanthropy, fundraising, grantmaking, building a board and community center.”