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## New roles of Community Foundations in Czechia



*Tomas Krejci*

The Czech foundation field is re-assessing and developing the role of community foundations - in particular in respect of leadership and empowerment in a challenging operating environment. Here Tomas Krejci, Chairman of the [Czech Association of Community Foundations](#), explains why the initiative was taken and describes the review process which will involve a series of workshops to identify and build capacity for new roles and build connections between community foundations.

‘A two-year project, “New roles of Community Foundations” has been started by a group of five community foundations and two support organizations at a workshop on 25th and 26th of June, Moravska Nova Ves.

The main goal of this project is to build the capacity of Czech community foundations to identify, define, and exercise their new and varied roles and to advance their abilities to respond to urgent, current community challenges. In particular, their community leadership and empowerment roles will be addressed. Participating community foundations will develop new skills to be able to act promptly. It is hoped the program will also enhance their sustainability and deepen their roots in their respective communities.

The Czech community foundations face urgent and increasing problems connected with maintaining and strengthening the space for open civil society. Across the regions where the community foundations operate, we have been able to identify two common general problems the foundations will address through the project.

The first is the increasing pressure by formal political structures and informal representatives of the economic and social power against the involvement of grassroots community initiatives and civil organizations in public affairs.

The second would be the insufficient ability of effective communication on the subjects that constitute the space for civil society.

We believe that community foundations can play a crucial role in addressing these problems in local environments. The local community foundations are not dependent on any formal economic or political representatives. They do not stand for any particular political or financial interest. This feature could help them to play the role of a mediator against the tendency to eliminate civic activities and non-profit institutions from public affairs. Many perceive community foundations as “activists” and label them as undesirable.

In the project, we would like to focus on the skill and the foundations' capacity to realize their role as a stable entity that can actively and lively react to current issues and situations in their area. It could be by mobilizing resources, gathering focus groups, being a provider of certain services, or being a mediator or a neutral ground for current problem-solving in the regions.

Also, our goal is to connect the community foundations on a national level and create a mechanism that would help a particular foundation in need to get to the expert information, services, contacts, and sources faster than before. The network would also help the foundations to connect with other platforms on a national or international level and possibly engage with more community leaders in regions where community foundations are not yet present.

The series of workshops of the local community foundations are critical activities to the realization of the project. Within the two-year scope, we will realize five two-day-long workshops that will take place in the regions of the local community foundations. We will also organize two one day long annual conferences. They will include peer learning, sharing of the skills and expertise, and setting up the foundations' mutual connections.

The first workshop was focused on the analysis of the local community foundations' environment, it defined problem areas they are facing and developed mutual understanding of the current situation within the local communities.

The project includes the following community foundations: Ústecká komunitní nadace, Komunitní Nadace Blanicko-Otavská, Jihomoravská komunitní nadace, Nadace Veronica, Komunitní nadace Tři brány. Support organisations are nadace VIA, spolek PODNOS and the think tank NETT.

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