

our joy and trouble, we understand one another. We want to live with other even though it requires being open, making us thereby potentially vulnerable...

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... Declaration of Openness to Public Control and Being Publicly Beneficial

With respect to our basic approach, being publicly beneficial may be understood as a contribution to public space – and any entity that operates publicly impacts the public space in its own way, shaping it, taking part in forming it. Public space shows more clearly than being generally or publicly beneficial that this is no abstraction; that we always have to speak of a specific action, of a specific constellation. Benefits are not easily evaluated within such a frame of action, even in case of seemingly radical actions – they also may be undoubtedly beneficial, for instance, if they fulfill purifying functions, contributing to a timely partial catharsis before deeper conflict develops. As different stakeholders in the public space rather naturally differ one from another as to their objectives and ways of achieving them, being publicly beneficial may not be systemically understood as a single set of attitudes and actions.

A declaration of openness to public control fulfills all requirements that may be expected in separating “private” entities from entities that operate in public objectives mode, i.e., they strive to be publicly beneficial.

A declaration of openness to public control represents a solution, as long as it includes significant features specifying the pledge concerning activities that the declaring entity will take as well as the pledge concerning activities it will not take.

Josef Štogr, NETT – the NGO Think Tank, Prague

Transparency as a Theme

Introducing General Approaches within the Transparency of Procedures at the Local Level Project

I have always been impressed by the popular maxim: “They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.” (Benjamin Franklin, Historical Review of Pennsylvania, 1759). What does it mean in the course of daily life when we say this, as it does not necessarily refer to heroic undertakings? We opened the project with an image that still stands as a strong example in this context:

I remember it as if it were today. When I was in elementary school in Prague, people used to leave the entrance doors to apartment buildings unlocked. Towards the end of my primary education, the practice of locking the front door was introduced, at first only at night and soon thereafter all the time. During my high school years, locked front doors became the standard. This was fewer than twenty years ago. Today, nobody finds it at all strange; in fact unlocked access doors are a rare – often suspicious – aberration. In the course of several years, we assumed a norm that was supposed to stop all criminals and other suspects who were ready to rob or otherwise hurt us. Leaving aside the question as to what extent locking our front door could protect us, more important is that we have not for a moment stopped to think what we lose in doing so: the often beautiful interiors of apartment buildings and especially the courtyards enclosed in the inner spaces between apartment buildings. We have voluntarily given up vast and diverse space in those inner courtyards. For an illusory feeling of safety we condemned ourselves by limiting our mobility to the streets and designated public spaces. Was this worth it? Was it a wise, considered change, or did we lose a great portion of our living space without paying much attention to it and became accustomed to it before we even realized the loss, so our kids never even get the

idea that, in pursuing their goals, they do not have to follow the standard marked route around the block, but can make discoveries, searching for their own ways through the inner yards?

What is the link between locked inner courtyards and transparency? Our project is based on the fundamental premise that the theme of transparency is principally different from themes of control. Transparency is primarily a matter of openly searching for and sharing a certain type of action, behavior and standard forms and procedures; it is a matter of cultivating the environment, trust and interest. We are concerned with arriving at a long-term norm where there is a voluntary decision of the relevant entity, of its own volition, to make its actions publicly available, and on the other side there is interest in such actions, their outcomes and the way they have been achieved. As such, transparency is a cultural matter, resting on current relations, though from a long-term point of view transparency exceeds this framework by setting forth customary norms; that which may be agreed upon has become “good and expected practice.”

In contrast, transparency as an obligation, is aimed in a different direction. Its outcomes involve resolving open questions into prefabricated general solutions, transforming accountability into control and enforcing control mechanisms. In this regard, we cannot speak about sharing responsibility for forming standards of action and social practice, but only about what we can get away with, whether we get caught and whether there will be enough evidence.

Having compared the aforementioned opposites in approaching the theme of transparency, it comes across as evident why this project stressed openness, a voluntary pledge and declarative principle. From this perspective, what came forth as the primary focus of our project was the context, circumstances and forms of a declaration of transparency as well as specific examples of what

other words to be adequately transparent and to operate in public space so that we gradually build the trust of donors, supporters, volunteers and fans. More control cannot do this for us, nor can any certification agency. It is simply up to us.

Jiří Bárta, VIA Foundation, Prague

... Transparency is different from reporting. Reporting, i.e., publishing information that the public (via state administration) requires from NGOs represents but a fragment of it. In the following text, I propose that the discussion concerned with transparency should begin by defining legislative requirements, separating them from the discussion concerned with transparency as such. If we free the transparency discussion from its obligatory aspect, we can focus on its principle nature: how open and communicative each NGO should, can or wants to be. To take part in such a discussion, the NGO sector will need theoretical background, applied experiences from abroad and data regarding the real actions of non-profit organizations...

Miroslav Pospíšil
Center for Non-Profit Sector Research, Brno

... One-sided acts, i.e., what we do because we regard it as the right thing to do, represent a fundamental feature in the actions of any man: not for fear of punishment, not for any other potential de facto reason, but a hidden trade-off, that is, action aimed at gaining certain advantages. A great deal of our action reflects our letting other people know what we want, who we are, what our values are, what make us happy, what we prefer. We share all of this – to a certain degree – with others and we want to share it, for it makes our lives better: we feel safe, we share

Transparency of Corporate Giving

... Recently, giving has become a phenomenon that a great many corporations strive to embrace. Some have set up their own foundations, others have found partners among NGOs, in particular among foundations that help them as experts in NGO-sector support. At the same time, there are still great many corporations that would like to give, yet they lack information as how to give effectively and transparently. One of the suitable models for corporate transparent behavior, including giving, currently involves the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The Corporate Social Responsibility concept has been developing since the 1970s, though still today it lacks a clear and single definition. This is primarily due to its being voluntary rather than required, appealing to the change in the fundamental bearing of the corporation from short-term to long-term, from maximum to optimum profits (Trnková, Jana: Corporate Social Responsibility, Business Leaders Forum, 2004). ...

Kateřina Niklová, Community Foundation of Elbe Euroregion

Why It Is Worth It to be a Transparent and Accountable Organization

If we think impartially about the greatest assets of the NGO sector, we would probably conclude that they include our reputation and good name as well as the trust of our donors, clients and partners.

If we lose our good name, reputation and the trust of our donors, clients and partners, we will lose everything. Thus, it is in our best interest to be accountable and to report responsibly, in

such declaration of transparency could be like, what could ensue from it, its potential consequences, how it alters the declaring entity and its environment, and how standards for such action could be formulated.

This project aimed at opening the theme of transparency as broadly as possible, before it shrinks without further reflection into lists of what somebody is obliged or forbidden to do, however well intended and well formulated they may be; before we begin locking other inner courtyards in the name of safety, control and order: inner yards of public space and civic freedom. For if they get locked once, who will be able to unlock them? Is there anything today that could make people stop locking the front doors to their apartment buildings – even if they could be convinced, having had no experience with unlocked doors, that they should care to do so?

Jan Kroupa, Podnos – Service Organization for Support of Non-Profits and the Civic Sector, Prague, <http://podnos.aid.cz>

We selected several illustrative quotes discussing transparency from the thematic conference volume:

... This April, the theoretical physicist Ulf Leonhardt, working at St. Andrew University in Scotland, confessed to journalists that invisibility could, in the not-too-distant future, cease to be impossible. He also introduced the theoretical model of a machine that would enable invisibility. ... The physical systems of invisibility introduced, however, are not able to change the quality of the matter. This is why they “simulate” transparency, employing the laws of physics. They work with an optical illusion. Simply stated: it seems that scientists have discovered a way for objects to appear as transparent even though they are not.

This “discovery of invisibility” coincided with the discussion regarding the transparency of NGOs in the Czech Republic. This discussion has revealed that Czech NGOs could be forced to appear as transparent

even if they were not. Nonetheless, let us remain optimistic. The transparency of organizations is somewhat different from the transparency of a stone. It can be gradually achieved without tricks and cheating. ...

Zdeněk Jakubka, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the VIA VITAE Endowment Fund, Ostrava

... The concept of voluntary transparency complements the obligatory reporting to the state administration and the public, moving beyond the limits of “control.” Transparency based on an organization informing the public of its own will becomes qualitatively different as compared to the required, enforced reporting. Such transparency introduces added value: the significance of a voluntary pledge reflecting the awareness of our own responsibility, which is simply not present in obligatory reporting.

Voluntary openness also builds trust on behalf of the public. Building trust in an organization is a long-term process and we cannot make it any faster by hanging an accreditation or a certificate on our office wall. Only the presentation of good work and specific actions may develop trust of our constituents. Such intangible gains may be followed by financial profits. This control function is assumed by the public, its interest and engagement cultivating a civic society as a whole...

Markéta Kubáňová, VIA VITAE Endowment Fund, Ostrava

The Minimum of Transparent Redistribution of Funding for NGOs

- Grants and subsidies for non-profit and grassroots organizations shall be redistributed to benefit all public actions with respect

- to the current capacity and situation of the municipality.
- The municipality shall acknowledge and respect the independence of local NGOs and grassroots organizations.
- Grants and subsidies shall be available to all local NGOs and grassroots organizations; the municipality shall not exclude anyone from the transparent redistribution procedure on the basis of politics.
- Funding redistribution shall be based on clear redistribution criteria for NGOs and grassroots organizations that have been formulated and publicly declared in advance, including deadlines and conditions under which individual NGOs and grassroots organizations may apply.
- The municipality shall announce the minimum amount of funding that shall be redistributed for the designated purpose within the given year.
- Funding is redistributed in set processes, also involving opposition representatives and the expert public (if there be no significant or practical reasons against it, as such as the size of the local community) through participation in tender and selection committees.
- Outcomes of the redistribution procedures shall be made public.
- The municipality shall have formulated a long-term transparent strategy of supporting the local community and civic life.

Municipality

In Date

.....
(Deputy) Mayor

This document is executed in two copies, of which one shall remain with the municipality and the other, for the purposes of the project, shall be delivered to the Vltava Foundation.

Michal Novotný, Vltava Foundation, Písek

The Transparency of Procedures at the Local Level

This project was implemented by the Community Foundation of the Labe Euroregion, two local partners: Vltava Foundation, Písek and Via Vitae Endowment Fund, Ostrava and the national NGO service organization Podnos, providing coordination and consultation support.

The project focused on the transparency of NGOs and grassroots organizations, the transparency of local governments in supporting NGOs and public action and the transparency of corporate donors as one aspect of the culture of philanthropy. It also opened general discussion regarding the significance and contexts of transparency and accountability. These specific issues are dealt with in detail in project outcomes of individual project partners.

The project will be concluded with an international conference on the Transparency of Procedures at the Local Level as of October 26, 2006 in Ústí nad Labem. It is for the purposes of this conference that we produce this brief project summary in four languages. Complex project outcomes have been compiled in a comprehensive thematic volume which is, understandably, published only in Czech.

Summary of a Comprehensive Conference Volume
Published within the Transparency of Procedures at Local Level Project;
This Conference Was Held on October 26-27, 2006
in Ústí nad Labem Czech Republic;

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