

“Leading the charge: innovative uses of technology and information to connect funders to communities”

1st June 2010

EFC Foundation Week

Square - Brussels Meeting Centre, Mont des Arts 22, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

[Fundacja TechSoup](#) held an informative and well received workshop/debate for [European Foundation Week](#) on the topic entitled: “Leading the charge: innovative uses of technology and information to connect funders to communities”. The session attracted more than 50 people from several countries in Europe as well as from others abroad. Presenters included:

- Gyula Vamosi, *Kaskosan.com* and Roma Community member, Hungary
- Sylvie Laffarge, *Director, Microsoft Community Affairs, EMEA*
- Gabriel Rissola, *Director, Dynamic Organization Thinking (D.O.T), Spain*
- Lenka Surotchak, *Director, Pontis Foundation, Slovakia*

Speaker presentations

Gyula Vamosi spoke about the website project, *Kaskosan.com - Whose child are you?* Highlighting a ‘lack of Roma in the Roma movement’, he noted how the website has helped mobilise Roma people at the local level to address social issues and change the perceptions of decision makers. He also stressed how the project has helped to reposition the movement in a way which has helped them to articulate a common identity. [Kaskosan.com](#) uses a Web 2.0 social networking platform with individual and group profiles. Languages available on the platform include Romani, English, Serbian, Albanian and Slovak. The success of the project is clearly evident with its 25,000 euro grant from a Norwegian civic support fund, exposure through YouTube videos, online competitions, offline events and partnerships with radio chat shows and international TV.

Sylvie Laffarge spoke about Microsoft’s commitment to enabling people and businesses throughout the world to realise their full potential through their technology. Microsoft works with NGOs and individuals in underserved communities to help them use technology to carry out their work. She pointed out that 40% of Europeans are not using public technologies and that this 40% is the hardest section of the public to reach. As a result, their community affairs programme aims to develop the technical skills of NGOs and marginalised communities and engage employees when doing so.

Gabriel Rissola spoke about NGOs efforts in using ICT to help women migrants gain employment in Europe. Several factors were identified as affecting the employability of immigrant women in the EU. These include language barriers, length of residency in the host country and double exclusion both as women and as migrants. His study looked at how digital competencies can help advance employment opportunity for immigrant women in 5 countries and assessed the extent to which e-skills training can serve as a catalyst to advance other key competencies. Improving language skills and training were identified as paths to employability of migrant women. His presentation also highlighted the fact that immigrant women with basic e-skills show higher levels of employment. This demonstrates the impact that the development of e-skills can have on employment prospects. He also spoke of the need for increased availability of e-skills training, which could promote awareness among those immigrant women who still do not appreciate its value for employment. In conclusion, he highlighted the need for

governments to transfer education credentials, and examine the development of e-skills for entrepreneurship.

Lenka Surotchak, spoke about the TechSoup programme in Slovakia highlighting the six month partnership with TechSoup Global to donate Microsoft software in Slovakia. She identified several problems encountered during the implementation phase, which included lack of funding for NGOs to become sustainable and run day to day activities, as well as fear among individual philanthropists that funds won't be used properly. As a result, the need for NGO and donor synergy, technical assistance, and engagement with other donors locally and international were identified as important. She also spoke about the *Great Country platform* that connects NGOs and donors and gives every selected donor and NGO a profile. This platform allows donors to see their impact and view results directly, while at the same time analyse the history and trustworthiness of an NGO and its capacity to carry out proposed activities. NGOs can then use innovative and modern tools to improve their 'know how' in fundraising, expose their work, submit more projects and approach new donors. This makes the platform very attractive to donors.

Open Debate!

The issue of whether 'slacktivism' is good for philanthropy was raised by Daniel Ben-Horin, founder of TechSoup Global, prompting discussions on whether traditional philanthropy is changing due to technology. One participant referred to technology as the 'great equaliser' but also highlighted that social media does not raise as much money as people sometimes think since money raised for disaster relief was due to the availability of payment platforms rather than social media. It was also asserted that 'slacktivism massages indignities'. However, the counter-argument was that young people may not respond to traditional NGOs as they may understand 'causes' better. As a result there was recognition of the need to use social media to help young people be more involved in the work of CSOs.

While the success of an orchestrated social media campaign was identified as important to the Obama campaign in the USA, it was also mentioned that caution should be taken in trying to replicate such a social media strategy in other countries, whether by politicians or NGOs.

The need to build coalitions of NGOs to have a bigger impact was discussed and ICT was identified as one means of doing this. The importance of recognising philanthropy in other countries and regions as being different to that in the USA and the UK was also identified as important when trying to connect funders to communities.

Plenary:

Q: Government department ICT is a double edge sword: it connects people and allows the potential of making a great impact, but it is inferior to face to face communication. ICT is replacing those forms of communication (protests, demonstrations, etc). How do you address isolating technology that disorients the communities?

A: When looking at internet communities you find that it's not an either/or; they do both. People meet online and it is very common for people to visit organisations later on, face to face. Technology is also used as an equaliser. Small grassroots organisations that could not compete with bigger organisations before can now promote their agendas on a larger scale and are also able to give authentic "field" feedback, which is attractive to most donors because they were technology enabled.

A: When providing computers to children for educational uses, another outcome is that it allows the older generation to have access to this technology. The value of the network increases as the number of people/organisations in the network increases.

A: We are far away from understanding the repercussion of IT, but through the power of technology people can round up large groups of people in a short amount of time, in multiple countries to promote and support a cause.

A: ICT provides greater reach and exposure. For example local entertainers don't have to stay local, they have the opportunities to go out and expand their presence. They can meet each other online as well as offline.

Q: When is the human contact necessary?

A: Social media is interfering with "home values". People understand causes, they don't relate to the brand name of NGOs. The younger generation won't follow traditions unless they understand their mission or cause.

A: Being offline and online are both important. 'Digital immigrants' are making important decisions that should sustain ICT, 'but digital natives' should also have a say as well as organisations like TSG who have a good grasp of ICT issues.

Q: Sustainability: Even though we have technology, our ecological footprint is still increasing. Technology isn't helping getting the point across.

A: If we look at e-mentoring programs, instead of having face to face meetings, they are able to communicate through the online community. This saves travel and paper.

A: What is the first thing you do if you want to meet someone? You go online. How much of your ecological imprint do you save? Not much. By holding e-conferences you can save tons of energy. We need to look at ICT as a bigger component of many activities.

Q: Are there ways to develop and sustain the interest of people?

A: You can provide content for people through radio shows, YouTube, etc. Once you have users, you can have people vote on the best video or picture and get the most popular ones gets posted. Also it is important to provide the historical content regularly to keep people interested.

Q: Do you think we have too many networks and sites for social media? Shouldn't they be all under one umbrella? It's getting harder for individuals to people to have multiple accounts so shouldn't we standardize?

A: No. The logic is to distribute knowledge through different media.

The session ended by concluding that there needs to be more avenues for civil society organisations to demonstrate how ICT has helped to connect communities with funders, in a way that clearly shows impact and results.