

EU ENLARGEMENT

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IT'S PEOPLE THAT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

How does an audience of 50,000 music-lovers help to build a better, bigger Europe?

That's how many people enjoyed "Music Without Borders", a project to promote art and culture in the multi-ethnic societies of the Western Balkans. Hundreds of musicians got the chance to play at events across the region, to the delight of thousands of spectators.

MORE THAN MUSIC

But there was much more than concerts going on.

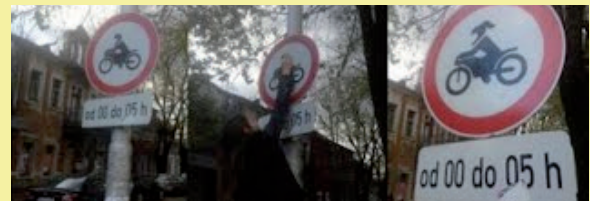
The young musicians, bands and managers who were involved acquired new skills in organising events. Dozens of music-related organisations from very different backgrounds also established contacts among themselves. And they all boosted their confidence in dealing with politicians and officials responsible for culture. The success of the project has made many of the authorities more receptive to civil dialogue, too.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR IMPORTANT PROJECTS

This was just one of the hundreds of EU projects which support civil society in countries that are in line to become member states. The aim is to underpin the legislative changes and broader reforms that the accession process demands of many candidate and pre-candidate countries. In 2011-12, the EU budgeted more than €40m for these civil society initiatives to promote change at grass-roots level as well. Because whatever politicians and officials say, in the end it's the people that make the difference.

In this way many different kinds of civil society organisations are aided in supporting reforms in everything from women's rights to environmental protection, and from media freedom to health and safety at work.

THEATRE IS HELPING YOUNG WOMEN IN SERBIA TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD



"It's very important here in Serbia, where woman are discriminated against", said a participant in a project to encourage greater respect for women. Through a series of workshops, young women learned skills that allow them to get engaged in local level advocacy. [read article](#) | [Watch the video](#)

IMMEDIATE BENEFITS

Many of the projects deliver an immediate benefit, like the concerts generated by "Music Without Borders", or the development of the Una National Park as a tourism asset in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or improved roads in rural areas around Bitola in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

LOCAL INITIATIVES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA HAVE BUILT UP NEW BUSINESSES AS WELL AS THE SENSE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY

Haris Komic, Director of the Centre for the Promotion of Local Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, points to EU-funded projects with Bihać municipality for the development of tourism in the Una-Sana canton and for bringing new capacities and contacts to local companies: "Positive, effective and efficient cooperation between a local governmental unit and civil society organisations, which transparently work together to develop the economy of the local community based on its actual needs."



FARMERS IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA WON NEW MARKETS BY PUSHING FOR A NEW LOCAL STRATEGY

In the mountains around Bitola, farming villages suffered from poor quality water supply and inadequate communications, until a citizens' initiative for rural development won funding to help them promote their products and secure markets among local restaurants. It also generated greater awareness of the people living in rural areas and led to the creation of a citizen-led strategy for rural development.

BUILDING CAPACITY TOO

But all of these initiatives help to build the capacity of citizens to engage in the issues that affect their lives, locally and nationally.

These civil society projects support existing citizen organisations, they promote the creation of new ones, and they encourage interaction between citizens and the authorities. Basak Saral, Secretary General of the Youth Association for Habitat in Turkey, said the work of its members in support of environmental protection had increased awareness of sustainable development among young people, and their involvement in decision making had enhanced local democracy. "It has revealed the immense potential of local communities in realising the basic concepts and principles of good governance".

Often this type of engagement is welcomed by the authorities, because it stimulates them in carrying reform through right down to local level. As Kadri Gega, of the Albanian Association of Municipalities, says: "There is very little impact of civil society in local decision making in Albania. There is a necessity for civic groups, first to be structured where there is none, and second to be empowered to a higher level, through proper project support."

But sometimes civil society pushes for faster change, impatient of politicians' resistance to reform or lack of accountability. Many organisations have urged for wider access to public information or for better monitoring of public finances and, in so doing, have also raised awareness among citizens. In Serbia the result is an online watchdog known as Whistleblower,

which lists cases of suspect practice by public authorities in procurement or conflict of interest. [more](#)

FREEDOM FOR MEDIA

Links with the media are important in this effort to support civil society. It helps to publicise and promote many civil society actions - 50,000 people wouldn't have heard about the "Music Without Borders" concerts without the media, for example. The vigour of the media landscape depends largely on the vigour of the societies it exists in.

In many parts of the Balkans, in particular, the media still struggle for the freedom to speak for society as a whole. As Veran Matic, Editor-in-Chief of Belgrade-based B92, points out, against a background of recent military conflict, old habits persist in the region, with the independent media prey to assassinations, violence, intimidation, and pressure through exorbitant fines and taxes. "People in power do not always want investigative journalism", he says, and "the lack of open debate has impeded effective legislation". [more](#)

WORKING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

His thinking is echoed by Željko Ivanovic, CEO of the Podgorica newspaper, Vijesti. "Free media are fighting for truth against state propaganda and defending the rule of law and rights of the individual", he says. And he insists that better prospects for media freedom largely depend on "the EU working with civil society organisations".