

CeRe – the Resource Center for Public Participation

2018 - Annual Report

External context

2018 was a challenging one for both established and less established civil society, especially regarding the relationship with the Government (at local and national level) and openness of the governance.

The Government attempts to hinder anti-corruption systems, and the ruling party efforts to protect their corrupt leader, remained the main trigger for discontent and conflict. Yet, due to the highly polarized environment and lack of communication and public debate, from one point forward, any governmental decision, good or bad, was quickly labelled by most of the activists as damaging.

In addition to issues related with justice and corruption, some fiscal legislation was widely contested.

Less powerfully then previously, new protests took place in Bucharest and other big cities. One of them – organized on August 10th – was violently [broke off](#). Throughout the year, the ruling party and Government response to criticism, protests or other attempts of the civil society, of the opposition or of international bodies was [despiteful](#).

If in the last years we talked about a significant increase in activism and public participation, the lack of positive reaction of the government to citizens' voices, slowly led to civic disappointment and higher discontent.

The stigmatization of NGOs and discreditation of activism continued during 2018. Generated by politicians and nurtured by popular media, the “foreign agent/sorosist” stigma was frequently used to attack NGOs and individuals. Sometimes, such attacks become personal - defamation or disclose of private information (protestors being paid to protest, activists described as drug users, mentally disturbed etc). To only mention an example, a State Councilor published the medical diagnosis of one protestor disclosing a mental disorder.

In addition to verbal attacks, we also faced attempts of the ruling party to obstruct NGOs through legislation. Increased bureaucracy and obstruction of NGOs' participation to the decision-making process are two legislative drawbacks. Anti-Money Laundering legislation and modifications to the Law regulating the NGOs impose [new burdening requirements](#) (reporting the final beneficiaries or the smallest donors). In the area of public participation, a new bill on lobbying is being discussed as well as new criteria for becoming part of consultative bodies. Intentions to restrict the freedom of assembly, to “regulate facebook” or to punish country defamation abroad, were also declared.

All the above are happening while the sector is facing systemic scarcity. Inability to communicate with larger publics and a general distrust in NGOs led to little public support in the climate described above.

In addition to the context described above, two more points are worth being made about 2018:

Two new political parties were established – Demos - Democracy and Solidarity Party (Left Centre) and PLUS (Centre). Both started as civic platforms. Demos founding members are mostly young academics

and activists, very active during 2012 and 2013 protests. Many of the PLUS founding members and leaders are former members of the technocratic Government (2016), some NGO members and business people. Most of them were very active during 2017 anti-corruption protests.

A relevant event in 2018 was the “referendum for family”, aimed to redefine the marriage in the Constitution, as being established between a man and a woman (constitutionally banning the gay marriage, already banned by existing legislation). The referendum followed a citizens’ initiative, organized with the large involvement of Church (and many local Mayors). The referendum failed as the turnout was only 21.1%, below the required voter turnout threshold of 30%. The low turn-out was the result of citizens discontent with the Government (as the ruling party supported the referendum) and of people belief that the referendum was useless (since the gay marriage was already banned). A noteworthy boycott campaign ran by human rights/LGBT organizations also contributed to the low turnout and failure of the referendum.

Briefly about CeRe in 2018

Despite the shortage of resources, during 2018 CeRe managed to keep up its work to proper standards. Some changes in our strategy responded to both the external context as well as to the internal challenges.

The most relevant shift in our activity was related to the government attempts to delegitimize the NGO sector, especially civic and watchdog NGOs as well as the activism in general. Thus, CeRe decided to take a more active role in facilitating collective efforts of NGOs and activists to preserve the existing space for participation, to communicate about the impact of civic NGOs and to stand by NGOs or activists that are abused or threatened. Towards the end of the year we gathered with a very diverse group of NGOs and activists and strategize for a campaign to be organized during 2019. Most of our efforts in this direction will be supported by the Network of European Foundations/Civitates.

In addition to this new coalition, CeRe kept working with other network and coalitions, aiming at strengthening their voice on policy issues. The newest endeavour in this direction is facilitating a group of NGOs and activists advocating for housing justice, especially in Bucharest. Besides working with the current group, we intend to explore ways for a more grass-root approach, by including people that are currently or used to experience poverty in the past. Depending on the resources we’ll have we seek to deepen our intervention on the topic with a community organizing oriented approach.

In terms of working with citizens and citizens groups, we continued to work with our previous clients, but encouraging more autonomy and building a partnership-based approach. Still, we continued to offer advice, assistance and support, based on specific needs.

In terms of advocacy assistance for NGOs we continued to keep a focus on social issues: the housing precarity of the Roma community in village, the local facilities of a very impoverished neighbourhood at the outskirts of Bucharest, food waste, access to health for marginalized groups were the most relevant topics we worked on with our clients.

A variety of workshops, learning and exchange of experience opportunities also contributed to our objective to build capacity and strengthen the non-governmental voices in the decision/policy making process.

Given the upcoming elections, we introduced non-partisan political organizing on our and our groups agendas. Exploring how they could use the electoral process to advance their communities issues, was a

discussion topic relevant for both citizens groups and organizations. Another new direction was related with the establishment of two new political parties that will diversify the electoral and political offer. Discussions with groups' representatives defined the need of citizens to be informed about the new political parties visions and plans. Towards the end of the year we facilitated a discussion between citizens groups' representatives and new political parties' representatives. The longer term plan is to facilitate similar neighbourhood meetings, for a better reach-out.

Towards our objective to create more space for participation, in addition to the coalition mentioned above, we continued our campaign to open up the city hall of Bucharest. After constantly monitoring the transparency and the openness of the institution, we publicly released a comprehensive report. Our efforts to get more people involved in the campaign and keep the topic on the agenda, paid off with some good results: recommendations for a more equitable set of criteria for the allocation of social were adopted by the local council, the Citizens Group in Prelungirea Ghencea was invited to discuss in a Council's Committee, a representative of a Citizens Group in Kiseleff was allowed to speak in front of the Council. These victories might seem small, especially as the general attitude of the Mayor and the local council continue to be spiteful. Yet, given the general context, we consider them relevant enough.

Lastly, to promote advocacy and activism as vehicles of change we organized a new edition of the Public Participation Awards Gala. Under the slogan *Activism sometimes catches you unprepared but rarely alone*, the 2018 Gala was about solidarity and collective power.

CeRe's Programs and results

1. Community organizing and offering advocacy assistance to citizens, groups, NGOs and networks so that they have the power to intervene in the decision/policy – making process.

The Advocacy Assistance and Community Organizing Programme

Through the Advocacy Assistance and Community Organizing Programme CeRe works to unlock and strengthen the voices of the citizens, civic groups and organizations from all over Romania in their efforts to get engaged in the decision - making process.

The purpose of the programme is to increase the advocacy capacity for citizens, civic groups, organizations and coalitions while also building their organizational development and helping them get their communities engaged. No matter the issue on hand¹, or the level (local and national), we offer strong support to people running advocacy campaigns in order to solve communities' problems and hold state institutions accountable. According to the needs of the beneficiaries and the available resources, CeRe's intervention is flexible and covers a large spectrum, from a complex assistance package employing community organizing methods to on the spot advocacy assistance when someone only needs a little advice. In line with our tailored assistance on advocacy and community organizing we try to put together our work experience in order to create better tools, offer workshops and create content on good practices.

In 2018, we have worked with a total of **40 citizens, civic groups and organizations**, as follows.

¹ CeRe has a firm set of values and we stand only by those issues that do not come in conflict with our values.

For 12 civic groups and organizations we have offered a structured assistance: support in organizational development, in running an advocacy campaign, in mobilizing communities, tailored learning opportunities, media and in some cases financial support.



Some of the issues our clients worked on are: increased access to health services in Roma communities, better infrastructure for a community at the margins of Bucharest, connecting with community members, access to better education for poor and marginalized communities, preventing sexual harassment in universities in Bucharest, stopping illegal buildings, better policies to avoid food waste, social housing for a small Roma community in Argeş County.

In addition to structured assistance, we continued to offer on the spot advocacy assistance. We had 28 specific requests on diverse issues such as: illegal buildings, community centres, public transport, use of 544/2001 law on public information, forming civic groups or a civic organizations, better infrastructure, unresponsive city halls, how to write a petition, etc.

In 2018 we worked directly with more than **60** people (offering mentorship, training, coaching, organizational development, mobilizing communities, planning the advocacy campaigns, drafting various materials, preparing for meetings with public officials, organizing events, protest, and other direct actions). And around **600 citizens** got directly involved in different advocacy campaigns.

Here are some examples of groups and campaigns that CeRe supported:

Together with the **Association Partner for You from Merişani** commune (Argeş County) we have worked to engage the Roma community in the village to improve its **access to health services**. Alongside the low access to resources and public services, the community also lacks the space and the experience of demanding their rights and acting towards improving the current situation on health. Thus we focused on creating space for in depth discussion on health-related issues and building stronger relationships among the members of the community. A **Forum Theatre** was developed and performed by young local actors in the community and outside it on the issue of **early pregnancies** and direct specific help was offered to members of the community dealing with problems in accessing health services.



AS Initiative is a young feminist group that has been fighting against sexual harassment in their university, The National School for Political Administration in Bucharest. We have been supporting them from the beginning in their advocacy efforts to have an anti-sexual harassment university policy in place.

As a university youth group, they have their very particular challenges, especially in terms of consistency of members, as many finishes their studies or are in very busy periods with exams. This year was a challenging year for AS as not only they were facing these issues, but also, they were lacking motivation due to the fact that the University did not want to take their requests into consideration even if they gathered 600 signatures from their peers and members of the academic community. After a short period of hiatus, the members regrouped and assessed their mission and their group composition and what are their plans for the future. We were by their

side to support this journey and to keep their motivation going even in bad times. In the beginning of 2019 we will facilitate a process of strategic and advocacy planning for the group, to revive the campaign and see what new perspectives they wish to explore.

E-Romnja is a roma feminist organisation that we have a history of collaboration through the years. This year we supported their work in “India” community, where more than 100 people live in informal



housing, at the risk of eviction by the city hall. As the community lives in very precarious conditions with a very ambiguous legal situation we decided, after discussing with people in the community, E-Romnja decided to start campaigning for convincing the city hall to build a playground for the kids and to support with asphaltting the roads and cleaning the garbage. A world cafe was done in the community on the 1st of June, the Children’s day, to raise awareness especially within the local administration. In parallel to this, we continued to research the legal aspects of their housing situation and discuss with

various lawyers, cadastres and urbanists to see how we can better push a favourable decision for the community.

Some victories of this campaign were: asphaltting part of the streets and managing to build more relations with the counsellors in the city hall. For the first time we also moved a bit further in establishing a connection to the mayor, who was silent throughout the year, and also with other stakeholders such as the sanitization department who committed to the building of the park and the garbage removal.

Floreasca Civică Group continued to advocate for their neighbourhood facing new challenges in regards to the building of 4 new buildings of 20 floors in their area, that will bring a lot more people, cars and thus pollution. We supported them in this fight with the organising of a protest and with a fundraising campaign to support their financial efforts in legal action against the company who commissioned the buildings. We also supported them in the process of influencing the new urban plan of the neighbourhood development that the City Hall Initiated.

Floreasca Civica is a very mature group that requires less support than others, as they managed to increase both their understanding of urban issues but also of community organising and advocacy.

Housing "Ulița Bărboșilor" In the village of Malu Vânăt from Merișani (Argeș County), on "Ulița Bărboșilor", there were several families severely affected by poverty, and in danger of losing their improvised homes due to the landslides that affected their plots of land. Most of them have a fiscal role for the plots that they have, and pay local taxes. After the floods, we supported the Partner for You Association to run a campaign on the subject, directly involving those affected. After several month of intense campaigning, we determined the public authorities to secure the right to housing for the six families, allocating a plot of land on a secure ground in exchange for lands affected by landslides.

What was new in the programme

Due to the increased request of specific assistance we had in 2017, we decided to make available more easy to use resources on our website. A **FAQ** new section on CeRe's website offers information on the most frequent asks we had on advocacy, public administration, and community organizing: <https://cere.org/f-a-q/>

2018 was a year of learning and acknowledging more the focus we would like to have on doing more **community organizing/advocacy assistance** on social issues (housing, poverty, access to health or education for vulnerable groups). This came with brainstorming with mentors and friends of CeRe that have experience on the issue, so that we could gather a more comprehensive idea on how we could plan for this.

Also, we encouraged most of our civic groups in being independent, and having mostly a partnership relation with CeRe, one that it is not based on dependency. We encouraged this partnership type relationships by constantly offering the civic groups opportunities to work alongside CeRe in different actions like our advocacy campaign on the Bucharest City Hall, or different legislative asks we had throughout the year.

Building relationships among neighbourhood based groups and interest based groups was another agenda we had. In December 2018 we organized a **Civic Open Space** to offer yet another opportunity for civic groups and organizations to connect and find ways to collaborate.

ECON - European Community Organizing Network

For a year now, we've been part of ECON's Fundraising Committee and we have planned for a long-term strategy for sustaining Community organizing in the central and eastern Europe.

In 2018 we identified and connected with various potential new funders for social change, and also, we have run a fundraising campaign in order to attract the necessary resources to be able to create a regranting system in for the member organizations of ECON and the civic groups they are working with.

Through the **fundraising campaign** we have reached around 500 people, and have managed to raise more than 4000 \$. The regranting system is only drafted, and we will finalize it in the beginning of 2019.

At an annual event organized in partnership with ECON – Citizen Participation University (CPU), we held a **donor meeting** with grant makers and potential funders for social change on one hand and grantees and practitioners on the other hand and explored ways in which we could amplify the impact of the existing funds and also create evaluation systems that assess the value this work creates, suited for participatory, process-oriented approaches.

At the end of 2018 we had the **annual meeting of ECON's** members, that also served as time to reconnect and share some of the joint issues we have on the political and civic context in this part of the region. New members joined the network, and we planned for a more membership focus activities for 2019, and also: increasing our fundraising efforts, having stronger relationships with the members and with our individual donors.

Non-partisan Political Organizing

In 2018 we also got to learn and talk to the civic groups we are working with about Non-partisan Political Organizing and how the civic groups can plan their actions in the electoral contexts that follow in Romania, but also about different ways of holding people running for office accountable or even having members of the community that would run. This would bring a new level of involvement from the civic groups and from the communities they are working with.

We created a space for conversations between various civic groups and NGOs to identify actions, ways to better use the next electoral campaigns to advance the causes we fight for. We launched the debate with various civic groups and NGOs to explore types of actions that can be implemented during the pre-electoral processes to advance citizens' issues on the politician's agenda. More than 16 leaders of local civic groups and grass-root NGOs met during 6 working meetings. The first action undertaken by the leaders was the meeting with the representatives of the newly formed political parties to learn about their programs and their intentions towards the next elections, Bucharest development. Such meetings will continue to be organized in 2019 in Bucharest neighborhoods with a focus on specific problems that citizens encounter every day.



2. To facilitate the exchange of experience among more experienced groups, organizations and individuals and those in need to get inspiration or knowledge

Shaping Participatory Democracy - Community organizing internship program

The exchange program, “Shaping Participatory Democracy”, that CeRe coordinates in Romania continued to grow and reach out new organisers. We recruited grassroots activists and organisers from underrepresented fields that took part in six-week internship stages with US community based organizations. Here they had the opportunity to learn about and experience the community organizing tools and practices. The program offered trainings and continues support on individual projects related to citizen participation and advocacy, civic education.

During 2018 we were also happy to continue hosting mentors from the US, and to exchange good practices.

The spring and fall recruitments of 2018 brought us a lot more access to other cities from Romania than Bucharest. We managed to recruit people from



Baia Mare, Oradea, Cluj, Iasi and Sibiu. It is really important for us to manage to reach organisers from other cities so that we make sure that knowledge is not kept only in the capital city and that people get to bring valuable experiences to their local communities.

Five fellows departed in the spring delegation and three fellows in the fall delegation. Their expertise ranged from refugees rights to Roma rights, working with visually impaired communities, LGBTQI+ and women's rights. With such a diversity, one of the benefits of this program besides the 6 weeks fellowship in the States, is working together, learning from each other and bringing different fields together.

Mentor's visits were a very important aspect both in the recruitment program and in the Alumni Network development. In 2018 we had seven mentors visiting us, working on social justice in various fields including immigration rights and racial justice. While visiting us mentors supported the fellows that were placed in their organisations with various trainings and coaching. They also met the newly recruited people and supported their action plan development. They also met the alumni network, bringing in energy and new ideas from the States while also learning about the situation and practices in Romania.

Other training sessions and workshops

Advocacy & community organizing

By request, CeRe delivered a variety of training sessions and workshops for volunteers and members of NGOs. This area of activity became one of our funding sources and also a tool to build knowledge and increase capacity of our clients on advocacy and community organizing.

As a result, during 2018:

- 10 local facilitators working for PACT Foundation improved their advocacy and community organizing skills and abilities;
- Community Foundation in Targoviste held community meetings during their strategic planning process;
- PACT Foundation planned an advocacy campaign to improve the legislation on informal housing;
- 40 civic education teachers found our specific examples of local advocacy campaigns and discussed about how could they encourage pupils and get engaged in such campaigns;
- 15 members of Help Age citizens groups in Moldova learnt about advocacy, community organizing and group dynamic;
- 15 citizens in a small town closed to Bucharest learnt about community organizing and about specific victories won by alike citizens;
- 5 community organizations coached by Fundatia PACT and their facilitators learnt about advocacy and planned their own local campaigns.
- 3 local community organizations coached by PACT Foundation, learnt about PhotoVoice, they planned such processes and one of them put the plan into practice.
- We also supported E-romnja with an advocacy training for their group of young roma people that they work with for two years. They were able to learn about what advocacy is and how is it that they can plan and implement a campaign in their communities.

Stakeholders engagement

Asked by one of our sponsors (Enel), we developed and facilitated stakeholders engagement workshops for the company regional offices, to help them plan to better engage their stakeholders in the company's affairs.

3. Strengthen NGOs' and activists' capacity to contribute to the policy-making through coalition building

Alumni Network

After various meetings that we organised with the alumni of our community organizing internship program, both 1 on 1 and in small groups, we organised a National Alumni Reunion in march. We used a participatory organising method, with alumni being involved at all stages.



The Romanian Alumni Reunion gathered 26 people in Busteni, Romania, to get to know each other better and to strategize for the future. We managed to have people from all generations of exchanges, working in different fields and with different communities; from Roma to LGBTQI, from civic education to housing justice.

While all 26 people have very similar desires of what to achieve with our community, we also realise that we still need more time to level our understanding of our work. Some of the main themes of what we want revolve around needing to learn and to upgrade one's knowledge and practice of community organising, understanding more about each other's communities and supporting each other when we are in need. Building partnerships was another important aspect, not only for various projects but especially for building collective power for social justice in Romania. People are also willing to contribute to the co-creation of this network, especially with time, energy and personal skills. By putting together all our resources (of knowledge, experience, sometimes money) we can scale up our interventions and impact.

We were also privileged to host the International Alumni Reunion which gathered 72 people in Sinaia, Romania, for the 5 days of learning and building bridges between our countries and the work we do.

From the newest country Albania we had 3, from Bulgaria 16, from Hungary 8, from Romania 22, from Slovakia 15 and USA 8 participants. The program was comprised by many opportunities to get to know each other better and build solidarity- either through learning something new from the good practices that exist in the network, or by relaxing and sightseeing in the area and at informal self organized events. Some of the topics of conversation we had were: resilience in times of change, influencing authorities through neighbourhood organizing, issue based organizing and rural organizing, funding and how can we



better fuel our movements, crowdfunding campaigning, building and maintaining a donor's circle and working with for-profits, how to build independent communities through social entrepreneurship, systemic change in education, universal design of assistive technologies for people with disabilities, political organizing, using technology to enhance organizing and outreach, marketing and PR, sustainable work, understanding systems of oppressions and about burnout prevention and self care. We also made space for conversations among the Roma organisers, the LGBTQ organizers, those working with people with disabilities, on education for strengthening issue based regional cooperation.

Facilitation of collective efforts on social housing

Part of its strategy to engage more with social issues, during 2018 CeRe continued to support collective efforts to advocate for improvements in the area of social housing.

We gathered NGOs and groups such as the Common Front for Housing Rights, Habitat for Humanity, Make Better Association, E-Romnja, the Group of Evicted Citizens from Vulturilor street, but also individual activists concerned with the housing local policies. Together, we aimed at improving some small local programs and policies such as criteria to the allocation of social houses in Bucharest, increasing the social housing stock, improvements of night shelters etc.

Due to lack of human resources as well as to distrust in the local administration willingness to tackle such issues, the energy of the group was quite low, in constant need to out-spoken activists to take the lead. Despite the lack of energy, the group had a quite notable success – convincing the Bucharest Municipality to make the criteria to allocate social houses more equitable. For example, with the new criteria, in the allocation of a house, the current housing situation of the applicant counts more than their level of education.

Without being able to call it a Coalition yet, we are proud to have been able to bring more people and NGOs closer to strengthening their collective voice on the topic of social housing.

Coalition for a Good Management of the Structural Funds

CeRe is working with a group of 35 NGOs aiming to contribute to the policy-making in the area of European Funding for Romania.

In 2018 we continued our work of consolidating the Coalition and facilitating its advocacy efforts. Even if 2018 was not a very good year for advocacy, the Coalition kept on monitoring the management of Structural Funds.

A new issue was under the coalition monitoring and advocacy agenda during 2018 – how effective the projects funded by structural funds are addressing poverty. To advance on that issue, the Coalition (with support for Open Society Foundation) undertook a research in 10 small underserved communities, where

European Funded projects are implemented. The research highlighted a few good developments (compared with the previous programming period) but also many shortcomings. The research also promoted a number of recommendations to implementers, Romanian managing authorities as well as European stakeholders.

The Romanian Managing Authorities responded quite promptly to some of our recommendations.

Shrinking Space Coalition

Considering the external environment, with a lot of legislative pressure and threats towards NGOs and activism, as well as with a public discourse trying to delegitimize the NGOs, CeRe felt the need to take a more prominent role in facilitating collective action of NGOs to defend the space for participation and security of the NGOs. During the last months of the year, having a funding opportunity from the Network of European Foundations (Civitates), CeRe, in partnership with ActiveWatch and the Association for Defense of Human Rights in Romania, gathered together a very diverse group of 20 NGOs and activists to be part of a new coalition. The group strategized to address shrinking space for participation. During 2019, together we plan a public communication campaign, legislative advocacy work, as well as a solidarity mechanism to support NGOs and activists, especially victims of attack and abuse.

4. Watch-dog and advocacy for better public participation in the decision-making

Open up the city hall!

During 2018 CeRe has continued its watch-dog activities regarding the lack of transparency at Bucharest level. Together with partner NGOs we monitored all the council meetings, encouraging other activists to do the same.

The second year of the mandate of the local administration in Bucharest (June 2017 – June 2018) was analyzed in a report released by CeRe and two other partner NGOs during the summer of 2018. Launched in a non-formal manner in front of the City Hall, with a good crowd of activists around, the report got good media coverage and brought the topic on the agenda. The main findings were:

- Only 4.28% of the public decisions were made after public consultations (as Law requires) – a little bit more than the last year;
- Citizens cannot address to the council during its meetings, even though the Law gives them that right;
- The debates among councillors were also restricted;
- Restrictions of the right to free assembly took place.

The biggest improvement is that the citizens now have access to the local council meetings (previously forbidden). This happened thanks to last year efforts made by CeRe and other NGOs and activists. Another improvement is that few more debates were organized.

In terms of public agenda, the partner NGOs analysed the (lack of) achievements of the local administration in two major areas: social justice and urban mobility.

In terms of transparency and participation, after releasing the report we continued to push for citizens' right to address the council. We worked to create more public interest by publicizing topics from the local council agenda directly to relevant NGOs and citizens groups. By encouraging and supporting NGOs and

groups to submit recommendations and requesting to have their opinions heard by the council, we are also showing that citizens to NGOs wants to have their voice heard because they have relevant and on the topic suggestions.

We had three important victories:

- The social housing-group convinced the council to take some of its recommendations for a more equitable set of criteria for the allocation of social houses. The group's right to speak in front of the council was denied.
- The Citizens Group in Prelungirea Ghencea, was invited to discuss in a smaller committee about a project of the Municipality that group is pushing for from a long time.
- A representative of a Citizens Group in Kiseleff was allowed to speak in front of the Council.

On related note, NGOs in other cities (Brasov, Sacele and Iasi) were inspired by our monitoring methodology and campaign and implement similar projects.

National level

As mentioned in the first chapter of this report, communication between the national government and civil society was rather tensioned, featured by the Governments attempts to limit the space for participation for both NGOs and activists. On one hand we count the bills on NGO Law and Anti-Money Laundering legislation. On another hand we count attempts to isolate or even abuse NGOs – such was the sudden replacement of NGOs that were members of the Social Economic Committee.

In this context, CeRe kept close to colleagues in the civil society and made efforts to prevent the deterioration of the relevant legislation.

Towards the end of the year, CeRe took a more prominent role and gathered a very diverse group of 20 NGOs and activists to be part of a new coalition to address shrinking space for participation (see above). For 2019, together we planned a public communication campaign to improve the image of the sector and specially to re-built the legitimacy of activist NGOs, advocacy work, as well as a solidarity mechanism to support NGOs and activists, victims of attack and abuse.

5. Promoting public participation and activism

Public Participation Awards Gala

The public participation awards gala is our most important instrument to promote activism and citizens participation to the decision-making process. Every year we select and award the most inspiring and powerful stories submitted into the competition.



The message of the 2018 Gala was built around solidarity and collective power. Last year's tagline "Activism sometimes catches you unprepared but rarely alone" (key visual [here](#)) engaged the public to take action into civic initiatives and find advocacy tools even when they feel powerless and don't know exactly where to start from. The 2018 Gala was, one more time, the scene for a wide range of subjects - education, health, civic rights, social problems related to marginalised communities - that were addressed through advocacy campaigns.

As with every such event, we were touched by the stories awarded and inspired by the courage and perseverance of the people that made them possible. 250 – 300 participants attended the event, while the on-line broadcast had a reach of 12,000 viewers.

We offered 12 awards – 10 stories chosen by the members of the jury and 2 special awards offered by CeRe. One special award was given by the national agency ANPCDEFP for youth participation.

Here are some examples of the 2018 awarded campaigns:

- pupils in Călărași fought for subsidized public transportation to improve access to education,
- rivers were protected in Făgăraș mountains;
- a law for banning the use of wild animals in Romanian circuses;
- campaigns for supporting the breastfeeding.

All the awarded stories can be found [here](#).

The overall online media coverage of the Gala reached to a large audience: 52 online press articles, 4 radio interventions had a viewership of 39,000. The facebook campaign around the gala reached to a viewership of 300,000.

This short [movie](#) and the [photo-gallery](#) shows a little bit of the energy of the event.



Thank you for reading!