Innovative Approaches in Advocacy Campaigns

– advocacy guidebook –

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Written by
Alexandru Palas

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Table of Contents

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This guidebook was developed as part of the 'Innovative Approaches in Advocacy Campaigns' project, run by The Resource Center for Public Participation (CeRe) and funded by The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation between November 2018 and January 2020.

The project goal is to strengthen the capacity of NGOs and initiative groups from Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine to invigorate their advocacy campaigns, by using bold and creative instruments and tactics. Eighteen participants consisting of artists (graphic designers, media/advertising, etc.) and representatives of NGOs, initiatives groups (working on diverse issues such as environment, LGBTQI, gender, citizen participation etc.) met and worked together to design new and innovative interventions, tactics.

With financial support from The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, twelve organizations and initiative groups implemented for several months local advocacy actions using diverse creative tactics and art-based instruments to accelerate their advocacy campaigns, both offline and on online platforms.

This guide is meant to disseminate the participants' success stories along with a light theoretical framework in order to inspire other interested NGOs and citizen initiative groups and to provide them with useful tactics that can be applied in their own work, amplifying their voices.

Advocacy work in the Black Sea region

Civil society organizations from the Black Sea countries Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine are operating differently, with distinct dynamics and manoeuvres to keep their governments accountable.

In spite of the existing legislation, in all countries, that permits access to public information and citizens' participation in decision making, on the ground, relations and dialogue between citizens and public authorities are very tangled, bureaucratic and the mechanisms envisioned by law are not always effective or consistently applied. In addition to this, many organizations in the Black Sea area, in order to maintain the relationship with the public authorities and to benefit from governmental financial support, adopt a friendly attitude and align themselves with governmental policies.

The advocacy work of organizations and initiative groups is focused on increasing transparency, ensuring meaningful citizens' participation in the decision-making process at all levels, countering corruption, changing or adopting legislation etc.

However, lack of stable financial support, a problem mostly faced by smaller NGOs and initiative groups, diminishes the impact of their advocacy efforts, slows down know-how transfer and strengthening the advocacy skills and capacities of the staff, volunteers and activists. A further challenge is posed by the repressive measures applied by governing parties that shrink civic space and suppress civil society and human rights activists who speak up.

An interesting observation is that many organizations outsource and buy creative

and art-based services and tactics for their advocacy campaigns rather than creating a space for internal input and developing the personnel's creative skills.

We believe that in order to increase and strengthen advocacy capacity, organizations and initiative groups from the Black Sea region have to re-think and diversify their advocacy manoeuvres and apply bolder art-based and creative instruments. The advocacy instruments need to be refreshed and combined with various artistic and visual elements in order to coagulate and galvanize citizens around issues that most affect them.

Vera Țurcanu-Spatari,
project coordinator

The Resource Center for Public Participation's experience

Here at CeRe, our work roots in the belief that the state should serve its citizens and listen to what the citizens have to say in public matters. We still have a long way to a just balance of power, with groups in society having enough power to make their voice heard and with decision makers putting the needs and the desires of the citizens at the center of decision making.

That's why we are committed to supporting groups of citizens and NGOs – especially those most in need – in their efforts to advocate for the well-being of their communities. Be it about a park, a deserted building or a better law to prevent food waste. What we care about is people's power to persuade the state institutions and public officials to do what's needed on those matters.

Over the years of doing our work, we were part of (and observed) many campaigns, some winning and some failing. Many people ask what the recipe to ensure the success of a campaign is. Obviously, there isn't one, although there are some ingredients that might increase the chances.

Creativity or innovation of campaign tactics could be among those ingredients that increase the chances. Sometimes innovation is welcome not only because it could help a campaign win, but also because it can be fun and disruptive and, through that, could energize the campaign team and supporters.

Creativity is also about using what you have. Here are several stories from our work that show you can succeed even when people in power give you lemons.

Using empty promises

This was the case of a small group of citizens in Bucharest. They were campaigning to have a muddy alley between two schools in their neighbourhood cleaned and paved so it could be used by the local community for neighbourhood events or school events.

They tried many tactics – petitioning, meetings with district officials, posts on facebook, more petitioning and phone calls, etc. They only got promises that were not getting fulfilled. At some point, they decided to go bolder without having an open conflict like a protest. So, they invented the "Neighbourhood's day". They announced the community that the Mayor promised to pave the alley between the schools and invited everybody to celebrate the neighbourhood's day on that spot "that would hopefully be paved until the celebration day, as the Mayor promised". Of course, the same invitation was sent to the district public officials, to the media and to the general public. To avoid a possible embarrassment, the district authorities went forward and cleaned and paved the space.

It was a very nice party during the Neighbourhood's Day.

Using electoral advertising

The following story comes from the same group as above. A couple of blocks further, the kids were going to school having to pass through heavy traffic so the citizens imagined an alternative route that could be built for the kids to walk more safely to school.

This happened soon after the local elections. They started with the usual stuff (petitioning, calling people they knew in office etc). Nothing happened. Even worse, they were diverted to another institution that apparently was the administrator of the space that the citizens wanted to use in order to create the alternative route to school.

At some point, one of the group members remembered that during the electoral campaign the kids got some electoral materials – among those some school time-tables with a message from one of the candidates

(who in the meantime became deputy mayor). The message was saying "I am Gabriel Petrea, I am your friend and if elected I will always listen to your concerns" – or something very close to that. Parents got their kids to write messages on those timetables referring to the traffic around the school and to the need of a safer route. All the electoral time-tables – saying "My friend Gabriel Petrea …" were directly handed to the deputy mayor at the next Local Council meeting.

Soon after that, the kids were able to use the new way to school!

Using your imagination

Another group of citizens in Bucharest used to have an old iconic cinema in their neighbourhood. At the time the campaign started (10 years ago), the cinema, once the symbol of the neighbourhood, was a completely deserted building, close to collapse. Meanwhile, the neighbours had no public space in their community to spend their free time, meet or organize events. They fought for ten years to convince the public authorities to refurbish the building and give it back to the local community. Among the tactics they used, one was to organize a movie watching event just outside the ruins of the old cinema. Through that they showed the need of that space to be given back to the community and created a lot of awareness regarding the state of the building.

Similarly, another group wanted to convince the district administration to pave a road that was in a very bad condition. After a heavy rain they organized a fishing event – with people actually fishing in the big potholes filled with water.

Oana Preda,
Executive director CeRe

What is advocacy and what makes it creative?

There are many alternative definitions of advocacy. One definition that we, at CeRe, work with, is:

An advocacy campaign is an organized process through which citizens or organizations influence decision makers in a transparent way to make a change for the community they represent.

Advocacy is a useful approach to bring change to communities and solve issues. Its aim is to bring real, immediate and concrete change. When people from the community are also involved in the effort (self-advocacy), they also get more power and confidence in their ability to solve their own issues, thus ensuring the long-term impact of the campaign.

There are many different tactics employed in advocacy efforts. They vary from aggressive (protests, civil disobedience) to mild (accountability meeting, naming and shaming) to friendly (formal or informal one on one meetings). They can also be offline (letter/postcard writing) or online (petitions or social media campaigns) and they can be community-oriented (workshops, community meetings) or focused on decision makers (public forum or debate). Choosing the right tactics for you depends on the type of campaign you are running. Is it an awareness raising one, is it a collaborative one or a confrontational one?

The challenge with advocacy is that, while you can literally read the advocacy manual and learn every possible type of action and when to apply it, chances are that so has the opposition, and the establishment has more resources than you and more experience resisting change. Your fellow citizens

have also seen a lot of advocacy campaigns - both failures and wild successes - so they are harder to impress and mobilize. Traditional tactics sometimes require a level of expertise and resources that the most disenfranchised of us simply don't have; does that mean they shouldn't be able to defend their self-interest? Another challenge, especially when it comes to awareness raising campaigns, is that numerous studies have shown that dry information rarely changes people's minds.

This is where creativity comes in. By adding creativity and innovation to your advocacy campaign you can reach more people and have a deeper impact on them, keep your opponents on their toes, guessing your next move, bring fresh energy to your base of supporters, get free media coverage and cut the resources needed for the campaign.

Going forward reading this guidebook, you will find several ways in which organizations or groups from around the Black Sea Region used innovation to their advantage, boosting their campaigns.

Of course, the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about creativity is art. Artists are known for their creativity and collaborating with one can help deliver your campaign's messages via a medium (painting, writing, photography, theatre, happenings, etc.) that is more impactful and it touches people on an emotional level. If your advocacy campaign gets endorsed by a well-established artist, that in itself will translate into a lot of free exposure.

Even if you don't have access to an artist, you can bring creativity to your campaign yourself. Creativity is a skill that gets better with practice and anyone can be creative.

You can bring innovation to your campaign by using digital technologies. You can use social media to reach very wide audiences at little cost. You can use databases and newsletter platforms to keep your sympathizers organized and informed. You might want to start an online petition to show that your cause has a wide base of support or you could use a crowdfunding platform to get the resources needed for your campaign.

Another way to breathe new life into your advocacy campaign is to focus on the people involved. Maybe you are applying an old and tested tactic that has never been tried before in your area, or the community that you are working with has never been directly involved in the advocacy effort, or perhaps you are switching from an expert-led campaign to a community-led one.

A tried and tested way to move people is to put them in direct contact with each other. Although this is a very old tactic, it still remains fresh, as storytelling and human contact have a very powerful effect. This contact can now be made more accessible by using new media and technology, thus bringing together old and new.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." (Maya Angelou)

ARMENIA

It is Time for T: Transgender Equality Campaign

By Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO

Goal: Push for trans inclusive policies by raising public awareness about trans issues

In Armenia, trans people live in a difficult, hostile and dangerous environment. The lack of accountability and respect for the rule of law is acute in Armenia and discrimination, violence, torture and other forms of ill-treatment still exist against trans people. They are denied housing, communication with families or friends, and are subject to physical and psychological violence. Meanwhile, the absence of state regulation related to gender reassignment surgeries and hormone replacement therapy puts the wellbeing and health of the community under risk.

Up to November 2018 the safe community center had 2652 visitors and 1156 beneficiaries received services

Right Side was founded in 2016 and is the first organization defending transgender people's rights in the Caucasus region that was actually brought up by members of the trans community. This recent trend of shift-

ing leadership from experts to members of the community that we've seen in human rights organizations around the Black Sea is a bold step towards better representation in a still hostile environment.

As part of this project, Right Side NGO produced a video about the transgender experience in Armenia and ran a social media campaign to make the general public more aware of these issues. They added an offline campaign to familiarize the public with their work, consisting of producing and distributing posters and other materials about their activity.

With this campaign, they tried a couple of new tactics, such as using art (animation), combining Armenian and LGBT culture and using social media to reach more people and to better get the message across.

#միայնՍԵՐ   #onlylove

Մարտիրոս Սարյան   Martiros Saryan
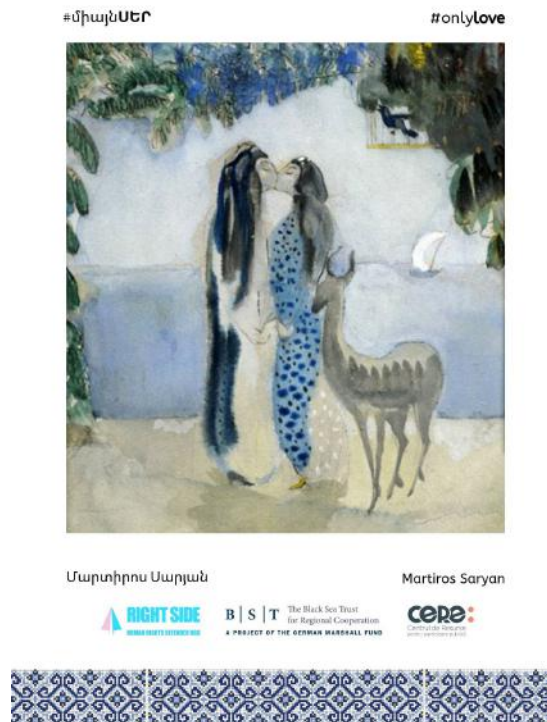
BULGARIA

Power-up Rights through the Language of Arts

By Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law Foundation

Goal: Oppose the anti-human rights rhetoric and widen the civic space for Bulgarian civil society organizations

In Bulgaria there is a growing feeling of shrinking civic space because of the recent negative trend of more powerful anti-human rights, populist movements and media attacks against foreign funded CSOs. These attacks have been facilitated by a lack of understanding of CSOs by the general public.

To counter this tendency, the BCNL Foundation used its past experience to create a space that fosters dialogue between artists and civil society organizations. Thus, artists and professionals in photography, illustration and literature met, inspired each other and talked about the importance of civil rights and freedoms, the value of civil society organizations and their work and how they could be reflected in socially committed art.

Socially engaged art is still underdeveloped in Bulgaria, with mostly younger artists being open to it, so the BCNL Foundation organized an art competition titled "Civil Alarm Clock", to raise the interest of more artists. The potential for greater exposure coupled with the presence of well-known cultural figures and public authorities' representatives on the jury managed to attract 85 artists who produced 200 artworks for

the contest. The works of art were focused on topics such as the right to association, the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of speech.

To ensure a better exposure for the works of art, BCNL negotiated intensely with the Municipality to get a central, very visible open-air exhibition space, they skilfully used both social and traditional media, organized a concert by the famous violist-activist Boyana Zhelyazkova, and also held a flash mob that made the exhibition more interactive and immersive.

The use of social media and creative platforms such as Canva or the Unsplash image bank helped drastically reduce the costs of the project.

This project managed to get hundreds of people involved – from artists to NGO workers and from active citizens to decision-makers, and showed that all of these actors benefit from closer collaboration, thus paving the way for future work and dialogue.

A project such as this demonstrates the impact that art can have by provoking, inspiring and making people more empathetic towards social causes. Expressing values through art can make even normally "dry" topics such as human and civil rights more appealing.

BULGARIA

Youth for Social Change

By Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie

Goal: Raise awareness and increase sensitivity around LGBT youth issues

A recent spike in homophobic and transphobic attacks in Sofia and Plovdiv highlighted the worsening situation in Bulgaria, as a whole, in regard to the attitude towards LGBT people and other minorities.

Deystvie decided to tackle this issue by empowering LGBT youth to create their own campaign to change public perception. Firstly, they trained a group of about 25 young LGBT people in creative activism tactics, providing them with the tools and knowledge needed to design and run their own campaign.

10 of the LGBT youth came up with a daring street campaign, where they handed out informative flyers to passer-byes, engaged people in conversations about LGBT issues and at the same time sent a message of support to LGBT people through the pos-

itive messages on their T-shirts. They did 5 such public actions on the streets of Sofia, where they engaged around 500 people and managed to offer support to 10 other LGBT youth by directing them towards the Rainbow Hub, Sofia's first LGBT community center.

Going out and speaking to people face to face can be considered a novel tactic when it comes to LGBT activism in Eastern Europe. Direct contact helped get people's attention and reach LGBT youth where previous online campaigns did not.

By empowering LGBT youth to self-advocate in creative new ways, Deystvie got a new group of activists who are already planning future campaigns in support of obtaining civil partnership in Bulgaria.

BULGARIA

This Is Me

By Fine Acts

Goal: Support the Roma community in Bulgaria and their efforts to end forced evictions from their homes

To raise awareness on the issue of forced evictions in Bulgaria, which disproportionately affects the Roma community, Fine Acts, a global platform for socially engaged creative solutions, organized a creative photography action in a Roma neighbourhood in Sofia where a group of Roma families was forcibly evicted at the end of 2017. They printed giant posters with portraits of people from the community, placed them in the ruins of their demolished houses, and shot the portraits from above. They placed the portraits in an unlikely setting to bring attention to the evictions of Roma families.

Their action appeared in over 10 media outlets, including mainstream publications, national radio, and international outlets. Additionally, Fine Acts distributed related

content through a dedicated webpage and their social media channels, thus reaching tens of thousands of people. The action was also part of an existing project called Inside Out, by renowned artist JR. Becoming part of a larger global network of actions and organisations is sometimes a great way to give additional visibility to your project.

This action empowered the people who were forcibly evicted and helped heal their trauma by involving them in the creative process while giving them a chance to control the narrative and illustrate a different aspect of their housing situation. The action led by the Roma community in Sofia illustrated the methods through which an issue can be communicated. It also showed others in the community that they have the right to speak up and be heard on their own terms, using artistic means. Three families have filed a lawsuit to keep their only homes and the action has contributed to greater visibility regarding their efforts to avoid eviction and displacement.

The project was also supported by the Sofia Municipality and the National Cultural Fund, which means that people from the administration became better acquainted with the situation of the Roma community and international best practices on the issue of forced evictions.

GEORGIA

Raising Awareness about Human Rights Violations along the Dividing Lines of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

By Human Rights Center

Goal: Raise awareness and spread information regarding the mass human rights violations ongoing in the dividing lines of Georgia

There are mass human rights violations occurring along the dividing lines of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including the right to liberty and security, freedom of movement and right to education. There is a lack of awareness about the details of these human rights violations in Georgian society as well as in international society.

The Human Rights Center conducted field trips to the villages located along the dividing lines, collected stories directly from the victims of abuse and gained their permission to issue the stories anonymously. The organization then edited the stories together in a brochure and printed 200 copies of it in Georgian and English to be distributed at national and international forums. The material was also made available online.

In the brochures, the Human Rights Center presented true stories where the victims themselves are narrating what they went through since the moment of illegal detention by Russian forces till their release. This storytelling approach provides a more vivid and relatable account of human rights violations than legal reports that provide bare facts.

STORY N5

It was 4:30 pm. I was lying in the shade when I heard noise. They came with automatic firearms. There was 80-year-old man nearby. They did not attack him. They said that they had nothing to do with the elderly.

> I was in the graveyard. They say half of it is their territory, but our dead are buried there. We buried a guy one week ago and I came there to see the graveyard. If you do not have GPC, you will not know where you are.

One day we were making the graveyard to bury a friend's father. They came from the other side and lay down near. There were little boys with us. They wanted to attack them. We stopped them.

MOLDOVA

Community Organizing in Villages Around Cahul

By Contact Cahul

Goal: Promote civic participation and develop a common visual identity for citizen groups from rural areas

Contact Cahul had been doing community organizing in the area around Cahul for a few years, providing training programs on local governance, discovering and developing leaders from the local communities, exploring issues and facilitating knowledge exchange between groups.

Their work lead to the development of "Local Citizens' Juries", autonomous groups that are able to identify new issues in their communities, find solutions and negotiate with local authorities.

As part of this project, Contact Cahul brought together 4 groups from villages around Cahul to exchange best practices, plan ahead and develop a common yet creative new visual identity that would bring the groups closer together.

The four groups did recruitment campaigns, community development activities such as fixing-up a high school courtyard, grassroots fundraising events, self-advocacy by bringing forth issues to the city hall, and they forged alliances with some public institutions like the post office.

Through this project, the local citizens' groups that were already autonomous and had good internal communication developed important skills related to how they present themselves to the outside world. They also got a chance to explore more deeply the issues they have in common.

JURIUL CETĂȚENESC LOCAL
CRIHANA VECHE
Pentru liberul acces!

COLECTĂM CU SUCCES PENTRU LIBERUL ACCES

Acțiunea/ Activitățile se implementează în parteneriat cu Fundația CeRe din România și cu sprijinul financiar al Black Sea Trust (BST)

JURIUL CETĂȚENESC LOCAL
SLOBOZIA MARE
Localitate mai curată!

Slobozia Mare mai curată, de către cetățeni protejată!

Acțiunea/ Activitățile se implementează în parteneriat cu Fundația CeRe din România și cu sprijinul financiar al Black Sea Trust (BST)

JURIUL CETĂȚENESC LOCAL
COCIULIA
Donează 1 leu, pentru parcul tău!

Orice implicare - aduce o schimbare!

Acțiunea/ Activitățile se implementează în parteneriat cu Fundația CeRe din România și cu sprijinul financiar al Black Sea Trust (BST)

JURIUL CETĂȚENESC LOCAL
GIURGIULEȘTI
Colorează zâmbete

Dăruind puțin vei ajuta mai mult!

Acțiunea/ Activitățile se implementează în parteneriat cu Fundația CeRe din România și cu sprijinul financiar al Black Sea Trust (BST)

MOLDOVA

Say NO to Sexual Harassment in Universities

By Center Partnership for Development

Goal: Raise awareness among students about sexual harassment and empower them enough to persuade competent authorities to produce the necessary reforms.

Data shows that the phenomenon of sexual harassment persists in the Moldovan educational system. It is alarming that only 15% of the harassed women have announced this, with the tendency to talk about their experiences only in the circle of close people: friends, neighbours or partners.

In the educational system of the Republic of Moldova, there are gaps both in the national legislative framework and in the internal documents and practices of the educational institutions. Thus, the Education Code does not explicitly oblige educational institutions at all levels to adopt internal procedures to prevent and combat sexual harassment. At the same time, the University Charters and the Codes of University Ethics do not define or, at most, give a superficial definition of sexual harassment and, respectively, do not provide mechanisms and measures to prevent and combat the phenomenon. At the same time, there is poor awareness among students of what sexual harassment is.

To address this problem, the Center Partnership for Development (CPD) realized that it first needs to educate students, so they developed an infographic on what sexual harassment is, how it happens and when. They then carried out a training session with representatives from the National Youth Council and the National Students' Alliance of Moldova, who then distributed the information and the infographic via their networks.

During the implementation of this campaign, an unexpected change of Government took place in Moldova. The CPD saw the opportunity to engage with the new political leadership and seized it. Thus, they had meetings with the new Prime Minister, with the Minister of Education and with Members of Parliament, in which they lobbied for the inclusion of policies concerning sexual harassment, the gender pay-gap and child care leave in the Governmental Action Plan for 2019-2020.

Shifting focus mid campaign from a bottom-up approach to a top-down one can hurt your chances of success, but for the CPD, this flexibility seems to have paid off, as their proposal was included in the draft law for amending the current legislation concerning sexual harassment.

ROMANIA

Shaping a New Zonal Urban Plan in Bucharest, District 2

By Floreasca Civica

Goal: Effectively influence how the new Zonal Urban Plan will look

Bucharest's local authorities, specifically the City Hall, have a long track record of abuse, lack of transparency and breaking the law, especially when it comes to giving building permits.

As such, Floreasca Civica, one of the city's local citizens' initiative groups, was rightly worried when they found out that City Hall commissioned the development of a new Zonal Urban Plan (ZUP) that would also affect their neighbourhood. In fact, protecting the identity of the neighbourhood is one of the reasons why the group was formed; they have already won a series of victories against City Hall and real estate developers trying to replace green spaces or to build high rises between the small old buildings that define the neighbourhood.

The citizens' group knew from previous experience that their only chance to influence City Hall's decisions was if they had the power of numbers. Naturally, the first step was to inform their neighbours about what a ZUP is and how it can affect their quality of life. In order to do this, they printed and distributed about 1000 brochures in the neighbourhood. The next step was to get the citizens involved in the debate of how they wanted their neighbourhood to look. Floreasca Civica organized a public forum in the main park of their neighbourhood. As an engagement tool, they asked the children that came with their parents to make chalk drawings of how they saw the neighbourhood. The civic group also filmed interviews with locals saying what they wanted from the new ZUP and used google forms and facebook polls to reach even more people interested in the topic. Another tool that Floreasca Civica used was coalition building, having two meetings with other citizens' groups that work close by.

The next steps are to continue engaging the local authorities in public debates around the ZUP, having all the support of the local community.

ROMANIA

Come Out – LGBTI issues on the #EUElections2019 Agenda

By MozaiQ LGBT

Goal: Support local LGBT activists and allies to better engage European Parliament candidates on issues of interest.

There is little knowledge about how local LGBTI needs are addressed by the European Agenda. Because of this, LGBTI people are at risk of voting against their interests. In addition, MEP candidates are discouraged to talk about how their role in the European parliament can serve the local LGBTI needs in Romania.

To address this issue, MozaiQ organized a public forum with candidates for the European Parliament.

Firstly, the organization assembled a team of volunteers to produce a database of candidates and a translation of #ComeOut4EU materials – a pledge created by ILGA Europe, a European federation of LGBT or-

FORUM EUROPARLAMENTAR PENTRU DIVERSITATE

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ganizations, in order to recruit future Members of the European Parliament as LGBT allies. Using the European pledge template helped candidates understand the scope of this action and having an up to date online platform where all the European signers were registered helped the candidates who came out in support of the LGBT community to identify likeminded allies. Using ILGA's online platform also cut the promotion costs and provided extra incentive for the candidates by making them more visible at an international level.

In order to get more visibility and participants at the public forum, MozaiQ built an alliance with E-Romnja, a Roma organization, and with Filia, a feminist organization. Including these partners in the planning stage allowed them to approach a broader topic in a way that highlights the common sources of oppression these communities face.

The team that organized the forum used facebook to its full potential, making a live video and distributing it on MozaiQ's page and in interested groups. They also used facebook's promotion tools to boost the organic engagement that the online campaign was already getting. Thus, the forum got 2000 views and word about the pledge signers reached 34,000 people.

12 candidates coming from 3 parties signed the pledge, placing Romania in front of countries such as Bulgaria, Slovakia or Lithuania in terms of number of signatures. After the elections passed, MozaiQ followed-up with members of USR and this resulted in the first Romanian MEP part of the LGBT Intergroup.

ILGA EUROPE — COME OUT FOR EUROPE — mozaiQ

Nicolae Ștefănuță

Alegeri 2020
USR 'plus

ROMANIA

Making the Budget transparent for Săcele Citizens

By 'Women get Involved' Association

Goal: Increase local public institutions' transparency.

The citizens of Săcele were dissatisfied with the state of the roads in their municipality, but this was just a part of a bigger, overarching problem: the lack of understanding of public spending – how the budget and public investments are built - is approved.

The aim of this project was to address the issue of bad roads and, by doing this, to improve the capacity of citizens to interact with local authorities, for them to be better informed and be more confident in defending their self-interest when things go wrong.

First, the civic group had to get informed in regard to how public budgets are built and spent. To achieve this, they invited an expert on good governance, transparency and public finance to have a work meeting with them. To increase the transparency of the decision-making process, the civic

group started a petition directed at the City Hall to publish information regarding investments in roads infrastructure; when access to public information was denied they sued the City Hall and they participated in meetings of the Local Council.

One of the group's biggest achievements was convincing the City Hall to broadcast online their Local Council meetings, making participation much easier for other concerned citizens. They managed to do this by holding community meetings on the topic of public spending, which got them more supporters.

Once they improved access to public information, the Săcele civic group ran a campaign for better roads' infrastructure. They organized a photo competition on the topic of waste of public funds and also took photos of the worst streets in the city. They then used the images in a social media campaign in order to create flyers and posters to be spread around the city and be used in a public protest. This was the first protest organized by the group and a very rare event in Săcele, so it got good coverage by

the local news and it gave a big boost of energy to other involved citizens.

Another innovative direct action the Săcele group organized was to lay dozens of broken shoes on the steps of the City Hall to show one of the ways the terrible state of the roads affects the local citizens.

The civic group in Săcele made determined steps towards having better infrastructure and on the way, they encouraged more citizens to get involved while they made the public decision process more transparent. They reached this result through aptly and creatively combining offline tactics with digital and artistic tools.

UKRAINE

Why do we need an election?

By NGO Institute Respublica

Goal: Raise interest of the general public in the elections and get a new Electoral Code passed

One issue that affects Ukrainian democracy is the existence of three different laws that regulate elections. Ukrainian and international experts recommend adopting unified electoral rules.

Respublica had been advocating for a singular Electoral Code. To achieve their goal, they powered up their "Active Community" network, an initiative started back in 2014 to involve citizens in the decision-making process that is now active in 31 towns and cities.

One component of their campaign was a street action organized in 25 cities on the same day with the purpose of raising

awareness about the importance of making an informed decision in elections and at the same time to gather signatures for their petition asking for the adoption of the Electoral Code.

For the street action they created an allegory for campaign promises by having nicely decorated boxes with typical campaign slogans on them, such as "Welfare of every family" or "Utilities heaven", that, when opened, revealed to contain socks with holes or firewood.

This street action attracted the attention of thousands of passer-byes, and activists managed to gather over 1500 signatures in a single day.

Respublica then submitted the petition to Parliament before the debate for the new Electoral Code. Parliament adopted the Code, but the President vetoed the law, so Respublica will have to continue their efforts for a unified electoral legislation.

UKRAINE

We define our park together!

By NGO Carpathian Agency of Human Rights "Vested"

Goal: Protect the local park and get people involved in the park design process

The small city of Uzhgorod had seen its main park threatened before by real estate developers' interests. A group of concerned citizens put up resistance and defended the park in court.

Now, the City Council allocated funds for the redesign of the park. 'Vested' realized the importance of getting the citizens involved in this process if they are to have a park for all and not just for the few.

To achieve its goal, "Vested" held a community meeting with over 60 participants which consisted of a series of workshops

designed to help people put together their vision for the park. The citizens wrote several proposals for the park design and discussed their merits. The proposals were gathered in a petition to the City Hall. This petition was signed by 77 people.

Following up on the first event, "Vested" organized a roundtable between leaders from the community and City Hall officials to discuss the proposals for the park design.

The event was attended by 16 citizens and 5 people working for the City Hall, among whom was the Chief Architect of the city. The quality of the proposals and the visible interest of the citizens convinced the City Council to take the proposals into considerations and make the redesign of the park a more participatory process, while in the past only architects would be consulted.
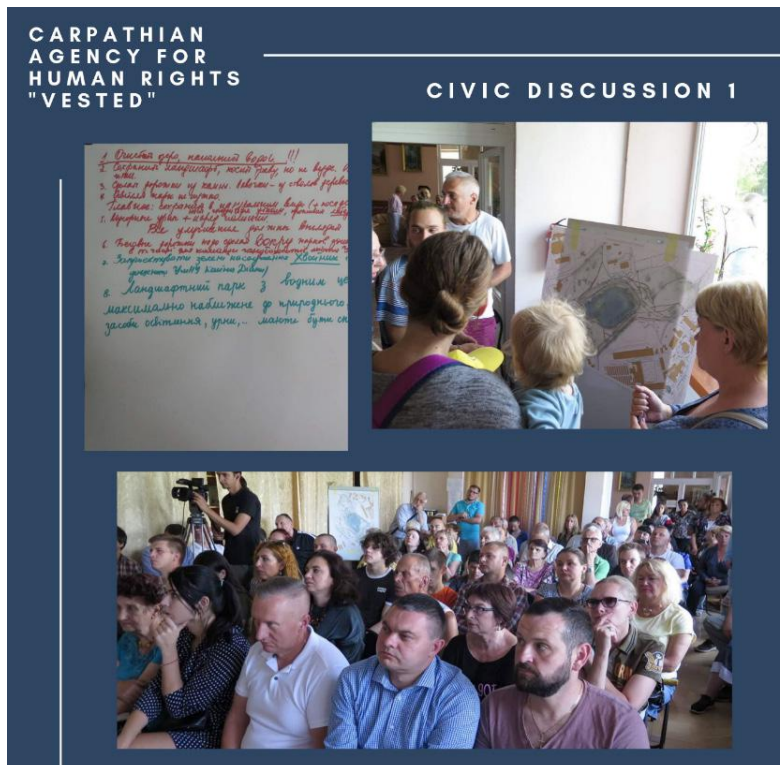
The organizations

"Right Side" Human Rights Defender NGO
Armenia, Yerevan
www.rightsidengo.com
Lilit Martirosyan, lilitt.martirosyan@gmail.com

Bulgarian Center for Not-for-profit Law (BCNL) Foundation
Bulgaria, Sofia
www.bcnl.org
Aylin Yumerova, ayliyumerova@gmail.com

Fine Acts
Bulgaria, Sofia
www.fineacts.co
Svetla Baeva, svetla@fineacts.co

Youth LGBT Organization "Deystvie"
Bulgaria, Sofia
www.deystvie.org
Dorotea Stefanova, stefanova.doroteya@gmail.com

Human Rights Center
Georgia, Tbilisi
www.hridc.org
Nino Tsagareishvili, ninitsagareishvili@gmail.com

Center Partnership for Development
Republic of Moldova, Chisinau
www.progen.md
Olga Sirbu, olga.sirbu.cpd@gmail.com

CRAION Contact-Cahul
Republic of Moldova, Cahul
www.contact-cahul.md
Strelciuc Silvia, strelciucs@yahoo.com

Asociatia Femeile se Implica - Civic Grup Sacele
Romania, Sacele
www.femeileseimplica.ro
Elena Belloiu, elenabelloiu@yahoo.com

Floreasca Civica Initiative Group
Romania, Bucharest
@floreascacivica
Cristina Vanea, cristina.j.vanea@gmail.com

MozaiQ
Romania, Bucharest
www.mozaiqlgbt.ro
Mihnea Florea, mihnea.florea@gmail.com

Initiative group "Kirpichka"
Ukraine, Uzhhorod
@kirpichka
Mykola Yatskof, yatskoff@gmail.com

All-Ukraine organization "Institute Respublica"
Ukraine, Kiev
www.inrespublica.org.ua
Alexandra Skyba, oleksandra.skyba@gmail.com

CeRe, Resource Center for Public Participation
Romania, Bucharest
www.cere.ong
Vera Turcanu-Spatari, vera@cere.ong
Alexandru Palas, alexandrupalas@cere.ong