



FUTURE SEARCH CONFERENCE REPORT
“Increasing local communities’ access to development funds – a means for solving real problems of citizens”

A Citizen Participation Week event
23-25 September
Cozia Hotel, Căciulata, Vâlcea County

CONTEXT

From September 23rd to 25th, 2009, PACT Foundation organized a Future Search Conference event, on “Increasing local communities’ access to development funds – a means for solving real problems of citizens”. The event took place in Căciulata, Vâlcea County, at Cozia Hotel and it marked the end of the project “Community-based organizations – centers for community mobilization”, a project implemented by PACT Foundation and financed by the European Union through the PHARE program (PHARE 2006/018-147.01.02 Increasing the role of civil society in Romania’s integration process, 3rd Component – Developing the NGO sector and civic education).

Given the context of the present economic crises, that increases the layers of poverty, exposing existing vulnerable groups and permitting the apparition of new ones, the absorption of development funds (especially European funds) appears to be an efficient support method for both these citizens and for the Romanian society as a whole.

To this purpose, the Future Search Conference was meant to shape a common vision of development funds’ stakeholders and to support them in drafting concrete action plans in order to redirect European funds so as to cover the real needs of economic, social and informational disadvantaged population groups.

The project “Community-based organizations – centers for community development” was aimed at building capacity for 12 community-based organizations from the counties of Argeş, Călăraşi, Dolj, Gorj and Teleorman, so as to increase their sustainability, by means of developing their abilities of working with community members in a participatory manner and mobilize human, material and financial resources in order to develop activities to the benefit of the community.

The Future Search Conference that marked the ending of this project was also part of a series of activities and events under the mark of the Citizens Participation Week (21 to 27 September 2009). CPW is an initiative of the Central and Eastern European Network (www.ceecn.net) – an organizational network of which PACT Foundation is a member of and which aims at „promoting citizen participation in politics and in the civil society”.

FUTURE SEARCH CONFERENCE METHODOLOGY

The Future Search Conference is an innovative analysis and participatory planning method that sets the grounds for systemic or organizational change by facilitating the discovery of a common vision and workground between various stakeholders groups.

The method is used all over the world by hundreds of organizations and communities, and was implemented for the first time in Romania with PACT's initiative.

The key concepts of the Future Search Conference are:

- Whole system in the room;
- Future scenarios are put into historical and global perspective;
- People self-manage their work;
- Focus on discovering the common ground rather than conflict management.

The conference stands on 4 main pillars: a review of the past, an analysis of the present, creating future scenarios and discovering the common vision, and finally, planning concrete action steps. Passing through all of these stages, participants develop a multidimensional understanding of the issue at stake, gaining a perception on both its temporal evolution as well as on the different perspectives of various stakeholders.

The conference's results are to be: the common shared vision, the action plan and assumed responsibility for this plan.

PARTICIPANTS

- Community-based organizations (non-governmental organizations with a legal status or informal community initiative groups that develop activities and projects to the benefit of their local communities)
- Final beneficiaries of local projects, as representatives of local communities
- Local public authorities (town or village hall, local councils)
- Local public institutions (school, police, church, dispensary)
- County councils
- County directions and offices
- Regional directions
- Regional intermediary bodies for various operational programs of the European structural funds
- Management authorities for the various operational programs of European structural funds

Representatives of these categories brought into discussion various points of view, knowledge, experience, expertise and interest in respect with the planning, management and monitoring of European funds, on the one hand, and on the other, the implementation, management and assessment of projects financed through these funds, at local/regional level.

PROCESS

In order to preserve the authenticity of the process, the information within the report presents the actual contributions of participants. Organizer's intervention is resumed to the centralization and structuring the information.

FOCUS ON THE PAST

Each participant marked important events that represent notable milestones and turning points on three timelines: a global timeline, a personal timeline, and the timeline of development funds.

Working in mixt groups, participants then analysed the content of the timelines and assessed the implications of that information on the subject of the conference.

FOCUS ON THE PRESENT

MIND MAPPING

The whole group created a mind map of present trends (social, economic, technological, political etc.) – that people believe are shaping the future of local communities access' to development funds. Thereafter, each participant had the possibility to use 7 votes in order to mark the trends that he personally considers most important.

STAKEHOLDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON EXTERNAL TRENDS

Working in stakeholder groups, participants analysed the mind map and noted the trends they considered most important from the point of view of the stakeholder they represented within the conference. Participants also noted what they were presently doing about the situation described, as well as what they are presently not doing, but would like to do in the future.

PROUDS AND SORRIES – OWNING UP

Stakeholder groups noted both individual and group „prouds“ and „sorries“ with respect to their present involvement in facilitating local communities' access to development funds.

DISCOVERING THE COMMON VISION

Back to working in mixed groups, participants created future scenarios. They envisioned the year 2019 and illustrated the future of local communities' access to development funds, by means of creative methods (dramas, TV specials, magazine cover stories).

By analysing future scenarios, participants discovered the common vision the group agreed on, by identifying and discerning common values from not agreed values, on one hand, and summing up projects, measures and activities that had been proposed for achieving the common vision, on the other hand.

ACTION PLANS

Participants formed mixed action groups and elaborated short term and long term action plans to reach their common vision.

FOLLOW-UP

Participants agreed to form a virtual dialogue space, in order to facilitate communication and implementation of action plans after the end of the conference.

Most part of the participants showed their interest in participating in future participatory planning events that would come as a follow-up to this conference. They proposed for follow-up events to either center around a specific development area (human resources development, agriculture, administrative capacity development), or to address specific problems of development funds management (communication, partnering, experience exchange with other EU member states that are beneficiaries of development funds).

PACT Foundation is also interested in the possibility to build on the results of this conference and shall take into consideration participants' suggestions in planning for future projects and events.

PACT FOUNDATION

PACT Foundation – Partnership for Community Action and Transformation (www.fundatiapact.ro) is a non-governmental not-for-profit organization that activates in the fields of community development and social economy. PACT Foundation has an office in Bucharest and works in rural and small-to-medium-sized urban communities from South Romania (South Muntenia and South-West Oltenia development regions).

PACT Foundations works downright with local communities' members and encourages them to associate in order to form civil society structures, that we generically call community-based organizations (CBOs). We support CBOs in being active, efficient and effective, sustainable and visible in their home region. We define **community-based organizations (CBOs)** as nongovernmental organizations or informal citizen group made up by members of a certain community that associate in order to initiate activities to contribute to the development of the community they belong to, addressing needs identified by its members.

PACT team has **7 years worth of experience** in supporting the creation and development of citizen groups in South Romania, mainly in rural communities. We have worked with approximately 90 citizen groups from the regions of Oltenia and Muntenia. Around 3 quarters out of these groups are currently still active, are registered as not-for profit organizations and continue their work at community or county level.

PACT team's **expertise** covers the following areas of community development: participatory community needs' and resources' assessment, participatory (strategic) planning, project planning and management, organizational development, public relations, communication and community fundraising, financial education and entrepreneurship. PACT Foundation also has a history in seed funding.

The community development approach that PACT Foundation uses in shaping various local development projects and programs addressed to disadvantaged/marginalized groups from rural and small-to-medium-sized urban environments , consists of various methods: developing CBOs, providing community facilitation, consultancy and training for community members and even for local development agents, seed granting etc.

The methodology of our programs and projects stands on a set of interlinked **values and principles**: participatory approach, public participation, civic engagement, "bottom up" approach to development, latent potential of local knowledge (that can be activated), trust in the capacity of community members to find viable and efficient solutions for the problems and needs of their own community, respect for diversity and for the development options of the community members.

As a means of preserving continuity, **PACT Foundation's policy is to keep in touch with beneficiary community-based organizations** and to constantly offer them assistance on various projects and activities. Our team strives to steadily support organizations it has worked with, by presenting them with new opportunities, according to needs they signal and stimulating them to undertake new activities to the benefit of their home communities. Our vision is for these organizations to become models for involving citizens in the community life and producing sustainable positive changes in their community.

PACT Foundation assumes the **mission** to contribute to the sustainable development of communities, by means of promoting local and regional initiatives, partnership and social responsibility.