



Invitation to the International Conference within the framework of the European
Year of Volunteering 2011

Voluntarily across the Border

Volunteering as a Tool for Connecting and Enriching Neighboring Border Communities in Central Europe

22 – 23 June 2011, Prague, Czech Republic

Dear Sir or Madam,

For decades, many border communities in the Central European space experienced the **border as an impenetrable, threatening line**, dividing the people living along it both physically with barbed wire and electric fences, and mentally by disrupting long traditions of cultural and economic exchange and by digging out new ditches of political and ideological disputes. As a result, many **border communities suffered severe damage in all areas of societal life**, creating deep discrepancies between the “inland” and border regions of the neighboring countries split by the Iron Curtain.

Although in other border areas the neighboring communities were not directly split by fences and ideologies, still there was **little space left for spontaneous civic engagement across the border**. The official doctrine of friendship and cooperation could hardly bridge the gaps created by the **systematic suppression of civil society activities** in the socialist countries.

Last but not least, the fact that the borderlines were typically running through **rural areas** confronted with complex **infrastructural, social and economic problems** represents an additional burden **binding the potential for the development** of adjacent communities.

More than twenty years after the “Velvet Revolution”, the **physical borders have mostly disappeared**, and also the sharp **discrepancies have** – to a large extent - **significantly diminished** due to swift economic and social developments. Yet some of the dividing powers of the border are still perceivable, constituting a **wide range of challenges** to be tackled by the communities living along it.

The year 2011, which has been declared the European Year of Volunteering, aims at **fostering Active Citizenship** of Europeans, through trying to involve them more in volunteering including **exchange of volunteers across the borders**. It seems obvious that an **intensified civic engagement through volunteering** can especially **benefit neighboring communities** in which the border still hinders potential for fully-fledged community development. Trans-national voluntary activities provide a rich experience in a non-formal and informal learning context. This experience **enhances the professional, social, intercultural and linguistic competences** of the volunteers, thus **contributing to their employability and sense of solidarity**, encouraging them to be active citizens and fostering their integration into society. **Local communities** hosting foreign volunteers **benefit greatly from their activities, which** take place in a variety of fields such as promoting social inclusion, preserving cultural heritage, fostering intergenerational solidarity and protecting the environment, while at the same time enriching the cultural diversity of the hosting communities.

In view of these challenges the border areas have been facing, and of the indisputable benefits of cross-border volunteering, we are pleased to jointly invite you to the international conference *Voluntarily across the Border: Volunteering as a Tool for Connecting and Enriching Neighboring Border Communities in Central Europe*.

Jiří Veverka
Director of the National Institute
of Children and Youth



Michal Urban
Director of the Youth Department of the
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
of the Czech Republic



Main aim of the conference

The aim is to support creation of new opportunities in the field of cross-border volunteering, with a close focus on the cooperation of local communities in neighboring border regions in central Europe.

Specific objectives

- To share good practices in the field of cross-border volunteering;
- To provide space for networking of non-governmental organizations, public administrative organizations, experts and researchers working in the field, and funding providers;
- To create new opportunities for cross-border volunteer activities, on the basis of already existing national volunteering activities realized in central European states;
- To present and offer cooperation between projects and initiatives which are already running in different Visegrad 4 states and other central European states, and which have the potential to become activities with an international dimension;
- To plan pilot initiatives/projects which will support the creation of new opportunities for cross-border volunteering activities in the areas of border communities and regions.

Main issues to be discussed

- Thematic areas of volunteering, with a close focus on the areas of culture, ecology, sport youth work, and sudden crises such as natural disasters;
- The specificity of volunteering in border areas;
- Barriers to volunteering in border communities, and ways of overcoming these barriers;
- Creating a sufficient and positive environment for volunteering in border areas;
- Possibilities of financing volunteering activities in border areas.

Prospective participants

- Organizers and administrators of inspiring projects/programs/initiatives in the field of community volunteering with a border region dimension;
- Representatives of NGOs from countries of central Europe interested in exchanging volunteers and implementing border volunteering activities;
- Representatives of regional public authorities and municipalities;
- Representatives of institutions and companies offering support to cross-border volunteering;
- Representatives of “Leader+” local action groups in border areas of Central European countries;
- Representatives of the European Commission and Central European states responsible in the area of volunteering;
- In total 80 participants.

What can you expect from the conference?

The conference will welcome stakeholders from different sectors: non-governmental organizations, the public administrative sector (public servants as well as politicians from regional and local levels), companies, grant agencies and other donors. This composition will enable exploration of the widest possible of cooperation. 9-12 examples of good practices in cross-border volunteering initiatives/projects will be presented. There will be an opportunity to present your organization, yourself and your network at the market of organizations. There will be facilitated time and space for initiating ideas and projects, and for finding partners to take the first steps towards creating new forms of cooperation.

Registration and practicalities

The registration can be done online on the website <http://conferenceEYV2011.nidm.cz>. Please **register no later than May 23, 2011**. Since capacity is limited to 80 participants, priority will be given to those with the most appropriate profile (with a view to achieving a representative balance of the respective target groups, countries and regions) who suggest the greatest potential for transfer and follow-up of conference discussions. Confirmation of participation, the final version of the program and organizational information about the venue of the conference, accommodation, board will be sent by the end of May 2011.

Subsistence and lodging costs are covered by the organizers. There is no participation fee. Travel costs will not be reimbursed. The working language is English.

For further information about the conference please contact:

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The preliminary program of the conference

22 June 2011

- 10:30 - 12:00 **Opening of the conference**
Welcome addresses by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and a representative of the European Commission.
- 12:00 - 13:30 *Lunch*
- 12:00 - 12:30 **Press conference**
- 13:30 - 15:30 **Examples of good practice**
Sharing of 9 - 12 examples of good practices relevant to the topic of the conference by participants of the conference.
- 15:30 - 16:30 **Preparation for the market of organizations**
- 16:30 - 18:00 **Market of organizations**
Time and space for participants in the conference to present activities of their organizations and to network.
- 18:30 – 21:30 *Dinner*

23 June 2011

- 09:00 - 09:15 **Summary of the outcomes so far**
- 09:15 - 10:00 **Sources which can support volunteering projects and initiatives across borders – moderated panel discussion**
Panel membership will include: a representative of the Visegrad Fund (tbc); a representative of a company supporting international volunteering projects; a representative of the European Commission (tbc); and a representative of a local/regional authority.
- 10:00 - 12:15 **Action planning**
Introduction to action planning, and time and space for participants to initiate ideas for cooperation.
- 12:15 – 12:45 **Reports of potential actions/projects discussed**
- 12:45 – 13:15 **Closing of the conference**
- 13:15 – 14:30 *Lunch*