



NGO LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

October 21-25, 2019 ❖ Bratislava, Slovakia

Overview. In October 2019, 25 NGO leaders from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia completed an interactive four-day management workshop designed to strengthen civil society in young democracies. This was the sixth annual workshop spearheaded by two University of Michigan units focused on strengthening emerging democracies: the Weiser Center for Europe & Eurasia and the William Davidson Institute. It was the fourth workshop held in Slovakia and the first organized in partnership with the Bratislava-based NGO Ambrela, an umbrella organization of NGOs in Slovakia dedicated to development.

The program targeted leaders of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia which have all had challenges in their democratization process, especially in the most recent era of fake news and disinformation. In this environment, NGOs have had a particularly difficult time navigating. The 25 participants were selected through an open application process and attended no charge. Their NGOs represented focus on democracy, education, human rights, and the environment.

Content. Sessions focused on:

- 1) *Human Resources for NGOs*
- 2) *Organizational Strategic Assessment and Change*
- 3) *Public Relations and Crisis Communications*
- 4) *Media Training and Reacting to Propaganda, Hoaxes and Disinformation*
- 5) *Climate Change & Civil Society: NGOs Role in Advocacy*

These sessions were taught by:

- *Linda Gasser* is Lecturer in the Department of Human Resource Studies at Cornell University, New York and Faculty Affiliate with the William Davidson Institute. She helped found and served as Executive Director of the Central Europe Human Resource Education Initiative.
- *Michael Hathorn* is a professor at University of St. Gallen and a partner in Optimis, a human resources consulting firm that specializes in organizational assessment, development and learning.



Michael Hathorn leads an interactive session on Leading Change.

- *Branislav Ondrášik* is a Security Research Communication Manager at ESET and has worked extensively in public relations. He lectured and taught for several years at various universities and he is a passionate civil rights activist.
- *Vladimír Šnidl* is a journalist at Denník N, author of the book *Truth and Lies on Facebook, Slovakia*
- *Miroslava Plassmann* is the director of the WWF Slovakia



Vladimír Šnidl talks to the group about how to deal with disinformation.

Participants had many opportunities to network during the week. Beginning with the opening reception on the eve of the program, the camaraderie continued through a group visit to Svätý Jur to enjoy a view onto the charming village and a trip to a small winery, where participants learned more about local wine production, regional grape varieties, and toured some of the vineyards.

Results. The goals of the workshop were to empower NGO leaders to: strengthen their internal expertise and managerial capacities in the field of human resources, public relations, and organizational change and assessment. Participants also learned how to communicate in

post-factual times, how to set effective internal communication guidelines. Facebook and LinkedIn groups are currently extending the workshop’s network. Participants continue to use these platforms after the workshop to share resources, funding sources, and ideas.



Professor Linda Gasser said of the program, “I continue to find teaching in the NGO Leadership Workshop extremely enjoyable and inspiring! Being able to assist all of these bright, motivated, activists trying to make change is very rewarding and satisfying. I am challenged each time and I always learn a lot as well.”

Evaluations were extremely positive, with measured outcomes of the overall program receiving high approval: relevance of content to organization; applicability to work; and match with expectations. Nearly all participants reported they would strongly recommend the workshop to others in their field.

Testimonials:

The NGO Leadership Workshop has brought an enormous amount of in-depth and hands-on know-how full of practical tips and real-life examples.

Participant from Slovakia

Great opportunity to learn and connect with inspiring people from organizers’ side as well as from colleagues from different NGOs.

Participant from Czech Republic

Next steps. WCEE and WDI plan to offer two workshops in 2020: a spring workshop in Warsaw and a fall workshop in Bratislava.

Further Information. Please see the [Weiser Center’s](#) or [WDI’s](#) workshop pages. View the video with highlights of the workshop here: <http://bit.ly/NGOWorkshop2019>