

LEARNING FROM OTHERS: THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL NONPROFITS ON LOCAL
GRASSROOTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The current study dwells into the world of grassroots associations with the attempt to reveal their specificities, bring forward good practices from USA and find out if those international strategies can be learnt by Romanian grassroots.

Aiming to see if Romanian organizations can learn from others, the study presents the Romanian third sector from its basic history, the paper's focal point being the interviews undertaken with six Romanian NGOs, namely four grassroots, one professionalized grassroots and one international NGO headquartered in Romania.

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Introduction

Grassroots organizations generally appear in the space between family, state institutions and the business sector- space described as the third sector and are defined as “self-organized groups of individuals pursuing common interests through volunteer-based, nonprofit activities, with a low degree of formality but broader purpose than issue-based groups, community centers or neighbor’s associations” (European Commission 1997). Named the grey matter of the nonprofit sector, grassroots possess a very special set of characteristics, such as their distance between the served and servers, the little transparency of their operations, the familiarity within them and the disconnection from political issues and institutionalism (Smith 1997, Eliasoph 2009) that differentiate them from other third sector organizations and reveal their importance for the nonprofit industry.

In the policy process, grassroots are very important due to their proximity to the ordinary citizen. As the European Commission itself opens up to public consultations and policy recommendations coming from grassroots (Radu and Radisic 2012), they are the most illustrative depiction of the subsidiarity principle, but more importantly their evolution and professionalization gave them the possibility to become partners in policy making, so they can even be considered street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010). Their role within society increases as resources and services tend to become scarcer and open to only to those who can afford them; in this context, grassroots get involved in public service delivery through co-production, where tasks are divided between state authorities and these NGOs (Mitlin 2008).

The current paper centers on examining whether Romanian grassroots are able to learn from their American counterparts in order to enhance their structures, their long term survival and success strategies. This paper presents six illustrative case studies of Romanian third sector organizations that either are grassroots or professionalized grassroots. In addition to this, the study will present the case of one international nongovernmental organization (INGO) that has a branch in the country in order to see if their evolution differs from that of grassroots. The NGOs are evaluated from the perspective of their mission and values, the process of establishing legal nonprofit form and the partners needed in the process, fundraising techniques, communication strategy, human resource and volunteering, future plans and key steps that may be of help when it comes to keeping their integrity untouched¹. All these elements are analyzed from the perspective of American philanthropy examples, where the donor-beneficiary relationships have changed into partnerships in a third sector that is open to every age segment and where

¹ The interview guide can be made available by request, but cannot be annexed here due to space considerations.

pioneers dare to use innovative measures for the well-being of their organizations; these American establishments are no longer classic nonprofits, but rather social enterprises that consider the risk of failing as fundamental, that rely on their own forces for survival and try to attract the best of the best when it comes to human resource in order to “go big or go home” (Fried 2012). The focus is on American NGOs as the USA can be considered the historical home of nonprofit and philanthropic activity (Friedman and McGarvie 2004).

Thus, through the Romanian case studies, I try to see to what extent the American third sector innovations are present in the depicted organizations. The selected cases present a description of the organizations and an analysis of the above described specifics; the multiple case studies are reunited under the same framework and aim to give a collection of illustrative situations that policy makers can use as a basis for the policies designed to regulate, help, modify or transform the third sector.

The structure of chapters

The first chapter will introduce the concept of grassroots organizations and present some American success stories.

The second chapter will be more specific and will trace the development of Romanian civil society from a historic perspective.

The third chapter assesses at what extent the American strategies are found at local Romanian grassroots level. It will depict the current situation of grassroots organizations in Romania as it will come forward from the portraits of the interviewed organizations; then, a personal assessment of the interview results in comparison with the American innovative model drawn earlier in Chapter 1 is presented.

The paper will conclude with a final remarks section in which I give an overview of the paper.

Chapter 1: Grassroots organizations

Internationally, as the third sector grew stronger and stronger, the emergence of voluntary associational life could not be ignored as an important part of the not-for-profit sector. In the view of experts (Eliasoph 2009, Smith 1997), grassroots are at the basis of associational life, considered traditional civic groups. Considered the result of participatory democracy (Eliasoph 2009), they constitute the number one capability approach of citizens to either access quality social services (Sen 1999) or advocate collectively to gain access to them.

This chapter identifies the characteristics that are specific to grassroots, assessing theories around their formation, structure and strategies, but also the tasks they can take up and the elements that ensure both their uniqueness and longevity. As the text dwells into the professionalization of grassroots, the focus will be drawn to the most notable innovations of the third sector- social enterprise, its benefits and the risks it brings along. Then, the analysis will reveal the cases of few American grassroots that can be considered as reliable examples of good practice thanks to their innovative methods.

1.1. Definition, typology and features of grassroots

Grassroots organizations are defined as “self-organized groups of individuals who pursue a common interests on a voluntary basis through nonprofit organizations that have a low level of formality but are broader purpose than self-help groups, community organizations and tenants’ associations” (European Commission 1997). They take up the space situated between the market, the state and the family and their members stay connected due to solidarity (Eliasoph 2009)

Smith (1997) and Eliasoph (2009) argue upon the differences between classic not-for-profit organizations and the rest of the civil sector. They support the fact that grassroots have a specific series of features that differentiate them from other kinds of NGOs. This set of characteristics is based on the idea of the sacredness of the voluntary act present in the American culture and can be summarized as following (Eliasoph 2009):

- A paternalistic distance between the provider and the beneficiary of the charitable operation: the classic voluntary organizations attracted people from the higher layers of society to preside and enterprise voluntary actions; there was always a class difference between the server and the served, the first acting out of pity for the “dear poor”;
- No need for the transparency and expertise in their operations: the lack of a supervisory expert board to which the grassroots need to respond makes them less responsible to a

broader public; however, organizations can bring this feature into their benefit, as no accountability allows them to switch between goals and learn by doing;

- Personal familiarity, but lack of diversity: even if they can be based on a diversity of domains, classic voluntary organizations do not have to be inclusive; just like a select club, they have the right to choose those seeking adhesion to the organization. They can even be based on negative or immoral bases². The positive thing about this is that once people become members, they do so merely because of adhesion and the comfort of being around people with similar beliefs;
- Disconnection from politics and formal institutionalism: members of classic voluntary organizations do not always “spiral outwards” to political issues, but instead they resume their work around operations that are “do-able”.

Another notable and important feature that grassroots share is the voluntary character of the organization. As Smith (1997) emphasizes, grassroots – unlike other nonprofit organizations – have a staff working in the association motivated by incentives other than money. Volunteers get involved in the programs grassroots launch just like in paid-staff nonprofits, state agencies or business ventures; due to this characteristic, grassroots have a significant level of structural autonomy (Smith 1997). Following this assertion, Smith divides grassroots into two: monomorph and polymorph grassroots. Polymorph grassroots are organizations that may have a membership in national associations of similar purpose; the polymorphism refers to the fact that they can take many forms. Monomorph associations are not linked to any higher structures and have a singular form (Radu 2012).

However, modern grassroots depart from these characteristics; contemporary voluntary organizations are characterized by transparency, distance audiences, diversity, equality and well-connected networks of policy advocates, policy makers, political figures and administrative institutions (Eliasoph 2009). So, grassroots have departed from the traditional voluntary character of the American classic and became hybridized (Eliasoph 2009). However, they still remain important parts of participatory democracy as they have significant function when it comes to socialization and activation of collective inquiries. Currently, grassroots act in five areas (Radu 2012):

- Social support and assistance/social services: mutual support and informal assistance between members of the association; short-term provision of social services to members or long-term assistance to non-members;
- Stimulation, self-expression, learning: the organization becomes the voice of its members, but also a source of stimuli, information and expertise. Their role is very

² For instance, groups based on racism and bigotry, such as the Ku Klux Klan in the U.S.A. or the Nazi Party in Inter-War Germany.

important in marginalized areas (Mitlin 2008) and the grassroots is an important source of knowledge for the volunteer;

- Happiness and health: producing health and happiness to its beneficiaries;
- Socio-political activities and influence: enabling higher degrees of activism and participatory democracy (expertise in the fields of analysis, reflection, self-knowledge and cultural awareness);
- Economic impact: these grassroots provide economic assistance to their members and some provide experience that may lead to the future economic welfare of its members³.

In the European Union, civil sector organizations can either be functionally participating (through a voluntary provision of expertise in the policy making process and its implementation) or functionally representing (through representing the plurality of interests of its members) (Radu 2012). Thus, in the transnational network the EU has created, civil society has a double role: that of a participant actor in governance through participation and representation, but is also the sum of all social interaction between average citizens.

Grassroots can also be considered the core components of the subsidiarity principle promoted by the EU through the decentralization process. They stand at the center of community life and engage in activities that fulfill some needs; they are the ones to activate the power of groups to develop activities that will benefit them in the field of social welfare. Their power expands into shaping personal attitudes regarding “social and individual responsibilities towards well-being” (Radu 2012).

Moreover, as world’s resources are reducing, grassroots are becoming increasingly active in the process of co-production – in which the state and citizens work together – in order to gain political visibility and access to resources and services. Co-production is a concept that refers to the joint approach of providing public services, with tasks divided between state authorities and the citizens; it is considered mainly a route taken up by poorer communities to consolidate their local associations and to have leverage when negotiating with the state (Mitlin 2008). Besides this, grassroots also use co-production to address their own developmental needs. Mitlin’s 2008 piece is relevant as it shows – through illustrative case studies – the complex transformations that occurred in the field of grassroots organizations since researchers such as Smith (1997) announced their hypothesis; her study demonstrates how grassroots assume today a series of tasks that make them accountable to the general public, are prone to the desire of gaining political power and became stronger due to innovations in the nonprofit field.

Policy-wise, grassroots are very important because of three broad reasons (Radu 2012). Firstly, they represent individual freedoms gathered through a collectivity – their importance grows in democratic

³ This would be the case of organizations providing training programs for the unemployed in order to aid them get a paid job.

regimes because they have group strength when making demands. Secondly, they are shaped by the socio-historical contexts of their location, thus being based on a specific identity and mindset, which means that policies will have to respect this framework. Thirdly, they represent a genuine approach to common good in a disinterested way as their members work on a voluntary basis; the policies they advocate for or create themselves are implemented to redress certain inequalities.

1.2. Innovations in the field: the emergence of social enterprise

As contexts have changed, so have grassroots; nowadays we see a professionalized pool of associations. This happened mainly thanks to (Radu 2012):

- The ability to accumulate financial capital which allows them to gain higher levels of autonomy. Still, the ability to find these resources is tied to level of expertise within the association: reaching funds is extremely difficult, which means that grassroots members need to have the ability to juggle with their skills.
- The ability to attract human capital: as grassroots started occupying a peaking level when it comes to trustworthy institutions (Smith 1997b), membership gain came along. More so, the informal approach to administration is yet another desirable quality of them.
- Structural abilities: grassroots had the ability to make use of relations they have built as they voluntary organizations strongly rely on networks and contacts to obtain information, know-how and expertise; all, informally.

The most notable innovation is social enterprise. While NGOs in Eastern Europe started developing after the fall of communist regimes with the purpose of democratization, overcoming market and government failures (Balogh 2012), social enterprise was the result of the government's failure to aid the delivery of public goods and services for disadvantaged layers of society when the nonprofit sector was still incapable to secure funding for these measures. Social enterprise was a modality throughout which nonprofits developed a specific framework that could earn them income used for solving social causes (Defourny and Nyssens 2010). In simple terms, social enterprise can be defined as the use of market based procedures throughout which NGOs (not just grassroots) secure themselves income that will be redeployed to finance social services (Korodi 2013).

Even from back in the 1970-1980s, nonprofits started to take over areas of activity that traditionally belonged to the state. Since third sector organizations (TSOs) were merely actors involved in aiding the state to provide public services, they were soon considered in the strategic planning of public policies. Their expertise and "common good pursuit" status earned non-governmental organizations the appreciation of the masses since they aggregated and involved citizens in volunteering, their high

performance activity and quality services, but also the inventive new structures that seemed more appealing than the blunt government structures, such as: partnerships, quasi-markets, social enterprises, foundations, charities and civic associations (Caiden 2011). Also, nonprofits had an aura of promoting mentoring and voluntary action that gave an impulse to social change which in substitution built and secured stronger and more connected communities, as well as transforming public service delivery (Billis 2010). In this context, as their importance grew and their resources shrunk, TSOs shifted towards social economy – the earning of revenues through business-like structures, methods and sources (Kerlin 2010).

As ideal as they may seem, the threats of the third sector expand to social enterprises as well. Let alone the fact that these institutions emerged from within the sector makes them vulnerable to the dangers exposed above; besides that, the involvement of market procedures in their functioning adds an extra-vulnerability to their status as money is the essence of most corruptible factors (Korodi 2013). Even if initially their objective of work was the integration of vulnerable groups and a slight expansion of the social welfare scheme, nowadays social enterprises appear in regions where development can be fostered, in decentralized local communities, environmental activism, fair trade and international development. Just like the environment they emerged from, benefiting from their expert human resource, they can provide ethical and/or any other type of counseling as a service (Balogh 2012), which of course adds to the spectrum of their activities and targeted groups.

To conclude, the emergence of social enterprises affected domains from education to labor market, being sponsored by the revolution the New Public Management has brought to governments. These organizations play a huge role in the current global market and political spheres as they undertake the role of advisors to public authorities, are strategic pinpoints of corporations through their corporate social responsibility programs and consistent mobilizers to possible social movements (Hoffman , Badiane and Haigh 2010).

1.3. American patterns of development in the nonprofit field

The beginnings of American charity can be traced back to the Quaker immigration, when religion was not about God, but rather about the beneficiary of one's kindness. Its essence can be followed to the paternalistic approach of the grassroots organizations that appeared as Eliasoph (2009) emphasized. However, charity centers on principles such as goodwill and love – that typically appear from religion (Lichtenberg 2009), while the social factor present in today's nonprofit industry makes use of social capital and public civic spirit.

In the context of the American economic crisis that went global in 2009 and with the background of hope that characterized Barack Obama's electoral campaign, the principles with which nonprofits had

to work in the United States of American changed considerably. This “new era of darkness” was being confuted by some heroes veiled under regular citizens blessed with great amounts of civic spirit (Fried 2012).

As Fried (2012) unravels the stories of fifty American nonprofits, she makes specifications about the nature of changes that non-governmental organizations made in order to survive nowadays. She argues that currently, NGO leadership and grassroots movements are undertaken by ordinary people and unlike the past nonprofit principle of “the further the better”, these NGOs work for local communities. The organizations presented by Fried represent hybrids of social enterprise and community service. Their status is defined and drawn by the following characteristics (Fried 2012):

- Partnership, not charity: as donor-beneficiary relations changed considerably and corporate philanthropy is considered a coin with two sides, today’s nonprofit organizations work for the creation of equal partnerships that can empower both communities and individuals in order to raise themselves out of poverty;
- Age is not important: it is never too early or too late to join the ranks of the third sector – being younger or being newer to the sector can only mean that one brings along innovation on areas that previously were not even considered;
- The sector needs a touch of eccentricity: today’s TSOs need a boost of pioneers as many ideas are being dismissed, ideas that appear to be crazy but could turn out productive in the amendment of certain social issues;
- Nonprofit heroism is based on entrepreneurship rather than anything else: in Fried’s illustrative fifty cases, most NGO leaders turned to the third sector after grounding themselves careers in other domains; despite their package of knowledge, when they first interacted with the nonprofit industry they had to consider the willingness to risk as fundamental. The stakes for succeeding as an NGO are very high because they are based on social needs: if a business fails, someone loses money, but if an NGO fails, the pool of problems that emerge have a huge social echo;
- Acts of charity are not necessarily acts of kindness: as the population of NGOs is on a continuous increase, there is an informal battle for funding; as mentioned above, some fundraising methods represent a coin with two sides, thus the surest way to thrive and survive is self-sustainability. The main alternate funding methods presented in the book are social enterprises;
- Scalability: in present times, in order to survive small ideas need to be transformed into huge actions. The new generations of social entrepreneurs see potential in exponential

growth as a maximized impact entails reaching beyond the limitations of the organization;

- Honesty and modesty: following the pattern of early American charities, true heroes never consider themselves heroes; in exchange, they possess humility and originality-items that can make an organization uniquely fruitful.

Katrina Fried's presents the innovative methods that fifty American organizations undertook in order to survive, but still stay truthful to their goal⁴. The following paragraphs illustrate some elements that once implemented can improve on the functioning of grassroots.

People's Grocery started from one of the most basic needs of humanity: food. Its founder, Brahm Amadi, founded the community organization with the purpose of "social change, not just offering social services". Founded in 2002, in California, People's Grocery is committed to building socially just and equitable food systems (Fried 2012). This organization can be considered a grassroots because it started from ground zero to pursue the creation of a better food landscape in the area⁵. Before the creation of People's Grocery, the situation in West Oakland was characterized by "environmental racism"- a case in which low income neighborhoods live in a form of segregation from healthy means of producing or buying food. Despite the fact that the community wanted to overcome its difficulties and be healthier, there was a disconnect between this desire and the legal pathway to enterprise something. The main innovation of People's Grocery was their outreach capacity: the organization discovered the need of the community and solved it in manner that would result in people's adhesion to the project. Its grassroots characteristics emerge from the fact that Brahm Ahmadi and his collaborators created a set of activities that were ultimately spawned by residents who had the best insights on how the organization would best serve the community and already had established an issue network and the relationships among people; this success story is on the go today too even if the needs of the community are different and Ahmadi left the organization to start his profit-based structure (Fried 2012).

Roots of change is yet another example of organization using good practices in the food sector. Its founder, Michael Dimock uses a grassroots approach and business-like perspicacity to advocate for the preservation of local agriculture. Unlike Ahmadi's People's Grocery, Michael Dimock's organization was based on the personal experience, expertise and connections that its leader acquired during his previous work in the agricultural field. Almost an entirely traditional grassroots organization, Roots of Change was founded with the mission of creating a sustainable mainstream food system in California – which was not

⁴ The information presented in this paper is partly taken from Fried's book and the below described organizations' websites.

⁵ West Oakland, California

Dimock's original place of action, making him more detached of the community he was aiding. However, as the organization evolved so did its line of activity: nowadays it has the wide purpose of connecting environments, communities and food systems. Roots of Change made use of the community consensus which was created through a window of opportunity at the proper time for a "food revolution" in the US.

Scott Harrison founded *Charity:Water* through a small online donations program which was meant to aid African communities lacking clean water. Following a career in night-time entertainment, Harrison founded his very small organization after a spiritual awakening that gave him the idea that little actually means more: on the organization's website, it stays mentioned that a 20 dollar donation can help millions. The innovative element in *Charity: water* is that underneath the traditional grassroots facade⁶ lays a reinvention of charity and fundraising models. As Harrison describes, his organization gave charity a new brand to trust, a modality throughout which his generation⁷ – otherwise estranged from the nonprofit sector – could be brought back to the "table of giving" (Fried 2012).

Scott Harrison's job helped him kick start his nonprofit. As a former nighttime event planner, he started organizing a lot of events in order to make his new project visible in a different environment than churches or suburban community groups. The first fundraiser he undertook was his own birthday: he requested every guest to donate 32 dollars for the 32 years he was. After this, he went online where people could buy e-cards for 20 dollars. He tried to make partnerships with companies working in water provision for installing tanks filled with dirty water in very popular locations⁸, where volunteers would be asking for a small donation; then, traditional grassroots fundraiser occurred: car washes, school speeches and corporate donations. Thus, what is exemplary in the case of *Charity: water* is the marketing structure used (using events), the intense use of the online environment (social media and online shopping available) and the outreach to a different audience (the young generation). Also, as Fried emphasizes, there is no longer a typical age when is right to enter the nonprofit industry and it does not matter what your former profession is – Scott Harrison is the embodiment of this principle.

Kiva.org is an internet based micro-financing nongovernmental organization working specifically in the area of micro-lending. Following the example of Grameen Bank⁹, Jessica Jackley, founder of Kiva tried to replace the typical donor-beneficiary relationship with a partnership that is based on mutual respect and personal connections. Having a social enterprise approach, *Kiva.org* seeks to help young entrepreneurs that cannot get financing from normal banks; its funds are raised through online donations

⁶ Namely the paternalistic approach of helping the "poor dears" under Eliasoph's (2009) structure.

⁷ Harrison was in his early thirties at the time he founded *Charity: water*.

⁸ For instance, Times Square in New York.

⁹ More on Grameen Bank on their website: <http://www.grameen-info.org/>.

worth of 25 dollars. Jackley offered the financing primarily to social businesses, schools and nonprofits; after reading about the lack of microfinance in countries other than US and Europe, she took the decision of seeking out other partners in the new areas Kiva wanted to fund. Nowadays, the organization has over 22 partners in different countries on the globe including South-East Asia, Africa and South America and focuses on financing businesses owned by women. As a grassroots, Kiva is innovative through its partnership formula and the distance between the donor and the served. Nowadays, even if Jackley abandoned the project in the favor of motherhood, she continues to promote the organization in the hope that the stories she finances will change “the way people see the world and themselves”.

Chapter 2: the history and evolution of the Romanian nongovernmental sector

Foreign dominance, archaic societal structures and communist domination affected the Romanian civil sector in a negative way. Starting with professional guilds and continuing with Western-influenced cultural associations, Romania developed a small, but culturally fruitful nongovernmental sector prior to the communist take-over. After 1989, the third sector has been in a perpetual struggle to survive under odd and old legislation, discontinuous financing schemes, low support from the population and difficult institutionalization. The following subchapters trace the historical events that shaped the Romanian third sector.

2.1. First signs of associational life and philanthropic activities before World War II

The first traces of civic activities on the territories inhabited by Romanian ethnics are minimal in comparison with other European countries; the Ottoman rule and the influence of Byzantium on the Romanian Orthodox Church have drawn the country into a low state of social modernization as the Orthodox Church would rather promote values such as self-sacrifice, instead of charity and helping the poor (Todor 2008). The first associative acts of the Romanian provinces were the guilds; they appeared at the end of Middle Ages, being coined as early business associations (Ilie and Colibasanu 2007).

Civil society started to truly develop after the formation of the Kingdom of Romania (1860); public life was flourishing as intellectuals were returning after studies in the Occident. They were the ones to organize the urban spaces into community networks such as political and cultural clubs (Todor 2008). The most popular such organizations were the political parties (the Liberals and the Conservatives) who were at the center of public debates and journalistic activities and the cultural clubs, which sought to create a dignified model of development for the country. For instance, Junimea, an organization formed of academics, writers and artists operating in Iasi and Bucharest had notable intermissions in the formulation of an educational policy and attempts to generalize socio-cultural events (Lovinescu 2003). Other notable clubs in the domain of sports and church were developing in communities belonging to other religions, especially Jews and Catholics (Todor 2008). Rural areas had known only agricultural associations (Todor 2008) and popular banks. In the late 20th century, the Socialist club was initiated, an endeavor that continued existing even during communist domination (Saulean and Epure 1998).

Legal acknowledgement of the third sector occurred post-unification (1918). Previously, the existence of an NGO had to be accepted by the Parliament, reason for which most organizations prior to unification were of political or cultural nature. But after 1918, the multicultural climate in Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina and the existent civic organizations there that were well developed due to the imperial influence (Badescu and Sum 2005) made it impossible for the same ruling to be put in place. In 1924, the Marzescu Law was promulgated and the freedom of assembly was reinforced, as also granted by the 1923 Constitution.

2.2. Nonprofits under totalitarian rule

During communism, authorities started controlling the lifestyle of the citizens through the nationalization of private businesses and ultimately all economic activities, the collectivization of agriculture and the forbiddance of all independent social activities (Todor 2008). Opposition from the population was not allowed, any resistance being punished with five to ten years of imprisonment. The political opposition had been eradicated by the communist secret police, Securitate, which soon started to plan the restructuring of the entire public through the disruption of press and the elimination from public life of personalities of the age (The presidential committee for the analysis of the Communist dictatorship in Romania 2006).

In this context, the only civil organizations the state did not forbid were those operating in the field of leisure, education and sports. Even if officially gender equality was being advanced, in reality women were being bound to the household, so the few pre-War organizations in the field of gender equality were dissipated as well (Todor 2008). Another form of civic engagement was created in 1977, when the system allowed the creation of tenant's associations. These small and inoffensive organizations had the purpose of organizing and solving the issues connected to housing in apartment buildings; however, they had a negative side: all families inhabiting the building where the association was formed had to belong to it. Nowadays, tenants associations still exist, without the compelling factor of forced membership.

After the 1956 events from Hungary, a passive resistance occurred that supported the peoples' cause through Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, where dissidents were making public the Romanian situation. The ongoing bad treatment of workers spawned the social riots from 1977 when a petition similar to the Czechoslovak Chart 77 was disregarded by state authorities. This situation caused the ban of worker unions in 1979 (Todor 2008). After these events, civil society started to exist only through unofficial networks; underground and student newspapers were edited by dissidents, while intellectuals started publishing their work in illicit manners. Even if the dissident minority cannot be

considered to having been of massive influence on the society, it is unarguable the fact that their role in reuniting citizen's revolutionary spirit was significant (Todor 2008).

2.3. Civil society during the transition period

In December 1989, the Front of the National Salvation (FSN) took over political power. However, the new government still had communist reflexes and tried to neutralize all forces coming from civil society. In 1990, as their communist predecessors, FSN arrested the people who took part at social uprisings calling them "hooligans". Normalcy was reached in 1992 after parliament and presidency elections, when associations had the permission of being founded without authorities' permission. Moreover, two civil society organizations- the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) and the Anti-Totalitarian Democratic Forum were included in the initial policy formulation process, but after the 1996 elections, their role decreased, being gradually removed from the consultation, advisory and the decision making board of the new government (Todor 2008).

Between 1992 and 2000, the third sector suffered some changes due to the introduction of new types of regulations. In 1992, an unconditional and unlimited tax exemption for nonprofit activities was introduced; tax deductibility of donations to foundations was also introduced. However, coincidence made this law to also support profit-making ventures that had no inclination to improve communities. Besides this, as most funding of Romanian NGOs of the time was coming from international donors, the law caused confusion with the global income tax and the taxation of income generating activities. The Sponsorship Law, though modified over the years, states that Romanian citizens sponsoring nonprofit activities may benefit from tax deduction of 5 to 10%, depending on the type of domain the NGO they are supporting is active in (Todor 2008).

International donors had a crucial influence on the development of the Romanian NGO sector. Their funding gave great flexibility to nonprofit organizations and enhanced the democratic transition of the country as modern third sector organizations could only put pressure on state organization to remodel itself according to democratic principles (Saulean and Epure 1998). Structurally, the access to foreign funding was easy and this factor hindered the cultivation of fundraising activities and community bonding, enhancing voluntary adherence (Todor 2008).

In 2000, Government Ordinance 26/2000 (OG 26/2000) replaced the 1924 Marzescu Law concerning associational life, which after 76 years since implementation was outdated; the new law gave clear delimitation on the categories, chores and activities that can be undertaken by NGOs. Thus, the law recognizes associations, foundations and federations as forms of organization of the third sector. Public utility status has been introduced which means that NGOs can offer social services, even those outsourced

by state authorities; in this case they are eligible to public income benefits. In 2005, following the Hungarian model, the 2% procedure was introduced whereby natural persons can donate up to 2% of their yearly tax to a nonprofit organization.

2.4. Accession to the European Union and the opportunities it brought along

Romania received the invitation to accede to the European Union during the 1999 Helsinki summit. The process of joining the EU was an effort for the country from a political, economic and social standpoint. In order to integrate, Romania would have to make several sacrifices in order to adapt to EU norms and living standards (Todor 2008).

Upon accession on the January 1, 2007, the EU – as a political institution- made a series of pressures on Romania. In a country torn apart by distrust in the political class and its institutions, the population viewed EU integration as a benefit, especially in the area of transparency and anti-corruption methods (European Commission 2007).

EU accession was both a negative and positive process for civil society organizations. On one hand, due to the fact that Romania was now an EU member state, most of the funding that came from international public donors had stopped on the idea that the country has reached a high level of development (Ilie and Colibasanu 2007). On the other hand, the EU integration brought along with it a series of financial instruments, but more importantly the pressure of transparent and subsidiary democracy.

EU membership gave Romanian third sector organizations the possibility to access structural funding; even if the Romanian authorities were meant to aid NGOs in the process of reaching funding, no efforts were undertaken by the state in this matter and the issue continues nowadays too (The NGO Coalition for EU funding 2013). While PHARE program was available, civil society organizations ran several programs that improved their own capacity in order to become reliable partners in greater community oriented work (Todor 2008). After PHARE funding stopped, the difficult bureaucratic process around the access to further structural funding and the lack of expertise of grassroots put Romanian NGOs in a constant competition among themselves (Todor 2008).

All in all, the limitations of present third sector organizations in Romania are highly influenced by the historic contexts the country has witnessed. As Ilie and Colibasanu summarize, the slow development of the nonprofit industry was determined by:

- Geopolitical factors: the territories inhabited mainly by Romanians formed a sovereign state only in 1859; with Transylvania remaining under the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, experts state that the history of the sector is one of Romanians, but not of Romania; Transylvanian organizations flourished under imperial influence and the

historical context of the region is believed to be a source of today's intense nonprofit activity there (Badescu and Sum 2005).

- Socio-religious factors: the influence of the Orthodox Church on Romanians did not propagate a charity dimension on its followers.
- The impact of the social structure: until 1859, the Romanian provinces were organized in an archaic way, the masses being established mostly in rural areas, where no innovations have pervaded; thus, the Romania was affected by a social atomization resisting innovations and being an “impenetrable environment for progressive ideas”.

Chapter 3: Current trends in Romanian grassroots

This chapter depicts the current situation of grassroots organizations in Romania as it will come up from the portraits of the interviewed organizations; then, a personal assessment of the interview results in comparison with the American innovative model drawn earlier in Chapter 1 follows.

3.1. Case studies of emerging grassroots

This section first depicts four case studies of grassroots that work locally – DAO Association, Corvin Supporter’s Association, Creative Room Association and PlusMinus Association; through an unintended coincidence, almost all of them activate in the field of urban regeneration. Then, the case of one professionalized grassroots (Civitas Foundation) is illustrated and finally, one international NGO that started out with a grassroots approach is laid out (Habitat for Humanity Cluj). The selection was random as I interviewed either organizations that responded positively to the request or NGOs that I worked with previously. To maintain a relative anonymity of the respondents¹⁰ I use their names’ initials.

3.1.1 “Duty, Attitude, Honor” Association - DAO (tr. Asociatia Datorie, Atitudine, Onoare)

In June 2012, D.B. was a candidate for a seat in the Local Council of the Municipality of Hunedoara. He ran independently as a representative of the civil society, from the mere desire to make a change in his hometown. Despite the fact that he had a modest electoral campaign, but a vast support from average citizens and some worker’s associations, he did not get the needed 7000 votes. He realized that the civil society has a certain force and can act out as a watchdog for the failures and mistakes of authorities. After this failed elections, he still kept his ambition and in November 2012, alongside friends and partners he founded DAO. A registered nonprofit DAO works in the area of local development and urban regeneration through culture and tourism. Its name is a statement of the values the organization works with: “From the mid-1990s, our town has been destroyed, people left and private interests were all that mattered for authorities. It is time to do something for this urban settlement, something that will put back Hunedoara on the map and this can only happen through the realization that this is the citizens’ duty, who have to start relying on values like attitude and honor”, says D.B.

The notoriety of D.B. and the support he obtained while running for office made the registration process and the rest of the legal facts surrounding the establishment of DAO a smooth process. However, when it came to actual work, the association encountered some problems with its projects – “the road from idea to implementation is a long and rough one, which needs to go through several filters that distort

¹⁰ As some of them have requested.

the initial project and make you not want to take responsibility for it” D.B. declares. This refers to the fact that even if the association comes up with a great idea that supports both its values and mission, that project will be in the hands of other stakeholders, such as grant-givers or private donors and local authorities, who will amend it and distort the initial idea DAO has come up with.

When it comes to fundraising, after its first year of existence the DAO aimed at attracting a great member base whose quota was used for the survival of the organization. The money obtained from the 2% mechanism helped the association to finance the projects it was involved in. Also, they were the recipients of small aiding schemes from the City Council in the projects they participated as partners to the institution. The fundraiser difficulties of DAO are very connected to their human resource: the funding members are all specialists in some domains other than the nonprofit sector – this impedes them from applying for structural funding. Nonetheless, currently they are pursuing a Norwegian fund for the creation of a Museum of Iron which will gain a corporate social responsibility (CSR) fund from Arcelor Mittal, ICSH and the local Industrial Park, the main industrial businesses in town. Other projects try to include stakeholders from the private sector: “we are trying to put Hunedoara’s traditional products on the map; for this we formed a producer’s association which will open stores in the entire county for these traditional, natural products. In this case, DAO’s objective was both the promotion of traditional gastronomy and the enhancement of local economy” says D.B.

As any other organization in the field, DAO relies on communication. When it was first formed, the organization used traditional methods such as flyers and press releases to advertise its foundation. Now, even if it does not have a website, the entity is active on social media (Facebook and Twitter), sites useful to gain volunteer adhesion and some funds, as D.B. confesses: “DAO’s 1 year birthday was celebrated through a party we promoted only on Facebook. We asked our guests to make a small donation if they wanted. It wasn’t a resonating success, but we raised some money”. He also mentions that the problem with online communication lies in its trickiness: while online many people will say they will attend an event or support a cause, it is rarely like that. Hence, they still rely on paper based communication.

Social enterprise is deemed as a valid solution by the organization. Most of their projects that needed physical work were performed by socially supported people. Furthermore, the Museum of Iron will be a social enterprise initiative because it will host and promote for free artwork from local artists; also, the stores that sell the traditional products aim to bring well-being: “Most of the producers are old and need to sell their products in order to survive, so we try to facilitate and enhance their trading possibilities”, D.B. says. Even more, DAO tries to establish an inter-cultural center where objects created by homeless, socially aided and other disadvantaged groups can be exposed and sold.

As for human resource and volunteering, DAO can be considered a typical grassroots: no employees, but a large group of volunteers. Upon the creation of the organization, 9000 people supported D.B.'s cause and the purposes for which the DAO was founded. Most of them became members or volunteers. What is interesting in this case is that membership is not restricted to one age group: "we have a lot of supporters who are still students or youths in their early 20s, but also people over 40 years, who, I guess, are nostalgic about the times Hunedoara was in its glory", D.B. announces.

Asked how he visualizes the future of his organization, D.B. replied that he feels that not only DAO, but all emerging grassroots need a lot of clarity, rigor and discipline in order to survive. He thinks that the future of nonprofits lies in strategic thinking and the distribution of chores in projects. About DAO's future he says: "we wanted to go big because we had lots of ideas, but no perspective on how to make them real. If we carry on with one single project at a time we can survive. After all, we have a good cause and people like us."

3.1.2. Corvin Supporters Association –ASC (tr. Asociatia Suporterilor Corvinisti)

ASC was founded in 2012 by a small group of fans of the Corvin football club (Corvin FC) in the town of Hunedoara with the main purpose of gaining support for the FC and stopping the dissolution of the team. However, soon its scope became vaster, as supporters realized what an impact their organization can make in the city as A.B., one of the presidents of the association recalls. Nowadays, the association is the organizer of every sports-related event in Hunedoara, with a special emphasis on the promotion of local symbols (such as the raven with a ring in its nozzle), the development of partnerships with other local institutions in order to re-launch the socio-economic life of the locality and the promotion of values such as equity, fair play, respect for the past and its heroes not only in sports, but in public life entirely.

The road that ASC took to formalization was bumpy and difficult. Starting with the registration process which took quite some time and counseling with lawyers as A.B. narrates, they had to assess every benefit the association would bring them; previously, fans were constantly in the eye of the police during matches, being called hooligans and often being fined. While supporters were trying to stay off trouble, the FC was facing serious problems and its dissolution was prompted out several times by the local council: "losing Corvinul FC means losing a valuable symbol of this town. We have one of the oldest teams in the country and this was the starting point for many Romanian football personalities". Thus, the association was created not only to advocate for the benefits the FC brings, but also for painting a better image of the Corvin fans.

The finances of ASC are modest. Being constituted as an association, the members have to bring in a yearly quota. However, this fundraising method brings only frugal incomes because "the association

doesn't want a large membership with the purpose of raising the yearly 120 lei (approx. 30 Euros) quota – for us it is more important to attract people who believe in our mission” A.B. rectifies. Another used method is the 2% mechanism from which the association will benefit only next year. Currently, they rely heavily on sponsorships and CSR: since they became more active in general activities only in 2012-2013, the 2% tax deductions were filled in 2013 and together with VAT deductions, they will return in the patrimony of the association in 2014. When it comes to sponsorship, A.B. makes an observation: “there is no incentive for a business to donate. There's a clear term at the beginning of the year when, according to the law, companies will get tax deductions because of their philanthropic activities. If we make a request afterwards, most businessmen will refuse us because there's no benefit for them; this is how the law works against nonprofits”. ASC adopted a social enterprise element as a fundraising method: they released promotional material (T-shirts, scarfs, stickers, wallets and other small objects) with the Corvin symbols in order to earn an extra income that helped the organization survive and fund other projects. Besides that, ASC received some in-kind donations too: the office they activate from is a donation from one of the members and the catering for the events pursued by them is part of a CSR scheme of a larger local business. In the future, ASC plans to access structural funding from the EU.

When it comes to communication techniques, the association is available in almost all online means, excepting Twitter. One of the vice-presidents takes up the task of communication officer and keeps active the official website, the Facebook account, the presence on Romanian and foreign football forums and replies to all incoming e-mails. In the near future, they plan to launch a web platform that will allow subscriptions to newsletter. In A.B.'s view, communication is a vital part that helps them remain active because it allows visualizing and expanding the symbols and causes they are fighting for, it keeps them involved in many communities and grants them the opportunity to reach out easily to new members.

The membership, human resource and volunteer aspects of ASC are promising: the supporters group had already been coagulated by the time the association was founded, so initial adherence was quite large. They try to reach out to volunteers with ages between 16 and 45 and sometimes they contract specialized help for some projects, situation in which they encountered problems: “this year in April, an older gentleman lent us 1400 photographs of the stadium and the FC from the 1960s which we wanted to scan in order to promote them online. We didn't have the necessary tools so we asked an IT free-lancer to perform this task; but if we just paid him informally, ASC would commit an illegality and legally, we'd have to pay an amount we couldn't afford. So, we had to name the man's paycheck a donation-which is ridiculous because we should be the ones receiving donations”, says A.B. The innovative factor in ASC's volunteers is the fact that the organization rents its members. If other structures or movements need support, Corvin fans carry out work in projects, with the condition of staying within the boundaries of the values they promote.

Regarding the future of the association, A.B. says that they have to stay strong and not sell themselves as “others do”. The entire NGO sector is under the pressure of accessing funds, which comes with conditions that change the initial purpose of an organization. A.B. also makes reference to the fact that in Romania, the nonprofit industry is clogged, with so many NGOs that have hidden purpose that not necessarily involve pursuing well-being and kindness, values that need to describe this sector. So, in his view “grassroots need to believe in their values, get professionalized and research possibilities that can help them stay active and true to their cause.”

3.1.3. Creative Room Association- AOC (tr. Asociatia Odaia Creativa)

The AOC evolved as an association from an initiative group of urban redevelopment specialists that coagulated in order to bring a creative footprint in the re-design of the capital city. The “chamber” was discovered in the meridian parts of the Carpathians and represents the natural treasures of Romania, that was transposed by the team to Bucharest and it plays the role of meeting and interaction point, under a roof that gives birth to creative ideas. The association feels that the future is in the city, hence the need for crafty and modern redevelopments – their plans are made reality through “a mix of research, visual tools and new media that can increase the understanding of local and regional development projects” confesses A.V., founding member and current urban and cultural analyst of the organization.

In the process of founding the organization, AOC encountered little problems as it benefited from the expertise of its founding members and the support of the Bucharest academia. Even more, from 2010 when it was formed, it was supported by national and international institutions and philanthropists.

AOC uses public-private partnerships to finance its projects. When it started, the organization had the advantage of accessing funds through the CEE Trust for Civil Society Program, the European Commission’s Youth in Action Program, the Administration of the National Cultural Fund and the Embassy of France at Bucharest. This money allowed them to kick-start some projects that placed them on the map of nonprofits. From then on, considering their know-how, they accessed structural funding, a CSR budget from Raiffeissen Bank and a grant from the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society. Also, the organization receives small donations from citizens, mostly architects. If currently, their financing is problem-free, A.V. mentions that “it was difficult in the beginning; we were yet another NGO in Bucharest – luckily, the Open Society Foundations put our initiative in its Grassroots Europe catalogue, we got publicity and organizations started taking us seriously”. Social enterprise is considered as the organization held several workshops and seminars in rural communities to explain the importance and methodology of reaching out to the LEADER funding scheme.

Organizational communication is a vital part of the Creative Room since it is one of the key components it works with. New media was the main element that aided the creation of the entity and it was through the internet that they reached the financing structures. Nowadays, many of their projects involve the web: “our most recent project <<Urban Narrations>> is a web platform that allows everyone to upload stories about Bucharest’s neighborhoods, which in the end will become a story of the stories about Bucharest”, says A.V. The organization has an official website, is available on Facebook, Twitter and RSS Feed. Its staff has a constant presence on architectural websites and magazines, thus using their skills to advertise the mission of AOC.

The great thing about AOC when it comes to human resource is their expert staff. Despite the fact that they have only four full-time paid employees and four cyclic collaborators, they are all specialists in the area of urban and rural development. Their voluntary base includes architects and university professors, but the organization is open to everyone who desires to spend their time and creativity in the Room: “we don’t target specific groups or ages, anyone who wants to join our projects is more than welcome to do so”, A.V. specifies.

In order to remain actively creative, the association needs to create newer and bolder projects. “The involvement in the LEADER aiding scheme promotion gave us the possibility to join a network of NGOs active in fields similar to ours. Cooperation is the key to survive”, A.V. says. Moreover, being open to any audience and reaching out to more than niche groups represents a mode that will make the Creative Room a present grassroots in the life of citizens from Bucharest and other places they activate.

3.1.4. PlusMinus Association (tr. Asociatia PlusMinus)

Launched in 2009 in Cluj-Napoca as a platform for the implementation of projects concerning architecture and urban planning, PlusMinus advocates for the establishment of an architectural hub that brings together professionals, public institutions and citizens in the process of urban redevelopment.

PlusMinus tries to popularize architecture through comprehensive workshops and creative projects directed towards the general public. Their pragmatic approach earned them the appreciation of corporate donors and international organizations, thus soon after their formation they obtained funding from The French and Swiss Embassies in Romania, the Swiss Airlines, Nestle, SwissArms and other global corporations. Moreover, they made use of the 2% mechanism without using social enterprise so far.

When it comes to communication tools, PlusMinus uses a selection of creative strategies such as photography and video-making. Relying on traditional techniques, social media and the internet, they have created themselves a mix that ensures them visibility and outreach to possible donors and volunteers.

The members of PlusMinus are not employees, which attributes to the organization a true grassroots characteristic. The organization seeks to attract only people true to their goal: “we want to involve citizens’ creativity in urban development so we organize contests, exhibits and workshop which we require our guests to think both critically and creatively”, says P.I., founding member of PlusMinus.

In 2012, PlusMinus was included in the Grassroots Europe movement started by the Open Society Foundations and the organization obtained even more publicity as its endeavors were published in the “New Initiatives” catalogue. They launched a bi-lingual study on the landscape of current post-communist cities that became a statement of PlusMinus’ views as an organization activating in its field. In 2013, the work of the association was redirected to Petrila, in Jiu Valley, a mining area that collapses since the closing of its mines. Here, the grassroots acts as an advocate and a pressure group for authorities to try finding solutions not only to Petrila, but other towns in its condition.

When it comes to future strategies and approaches, P.I. does not give a clear answer; he is happy that they managed to expand to other areas such the mining town and Galati, near the Danube Delta. He says that they intend to get even more digitalized and tech innovative, but trying to keep their touch of creativity and critical thinking. “Organizations like our need to exist due to the deplorable situation our cities lie in. Even if generally people think that only Transylvanian cities used to be beautiful, as an architect, I know that before communism, all Romanian urban settlements used to have a certain charm – that is what we advocate for and what we hope to give back to communities.”

3.2. Professionalized grassroots and international NGOs

3.2.1. Civitas Foundation (tr. Fundatia Civitas)

In 1992, when Civitas was founded by a few professionals, the main concern of the nonprofit was the promotion of democracy and citizen participation to the local decision making process. In the meantime, as Romania became part of the EU, the mission of the organization shifted towards enhancing economic, local well-being. Currently, the organization works in projects concerning local and regional development, offers support for local organizations and through its new pilot project-Civitas Consulting, trains public administrators in diverse fields.

The interview with M.B., regional director, reveals that their funding is now a diverse and fruitful scheme since in the past years, the organization has obtained both international grants and structural funds; however, he recalls that in the beginning “we pursued every type of method: door-to-door or phone financing requests, open letters to authorities or CSR. The implementation of the 2% method has been the backbone of reaching out for more international/structural aid”.

As for communication, HR management and volunteers, 2011 was a cornerstone in their activity, as it was the first year that Civitas started working strategically, namely through project based activities. This allows them to hire staff for determined periods and access funding that is only given to this type of approach. Even if volunteer adhesion remains unchanged, the communication system becomes a sectionalized process that allows teams of staff to have more autonomy in their projects. M.B. declares: “project-based activities allow Civitas to work with greater order and clarity. Currently, our Cluj-Napoca office has 12 projects which involve 20 talented and dynamic people. Also, each year our organization selects a student-intern, whom we might offer a permanent contract at the end of the 3 month traineeship”. All their projects benefit from presence in the online environment and Civitas’ work is publicized not only through events, but also publications.

Civitas developed fruitfully from a few volunteer professionals into the NGO it is today because of the ambition and expertise of its founders. It is now one of the most prestigious nonprofits from Transylvania, with a considerable amount of foreign partners and it all started from a grassroots focused on democratization and local development.

3.2.2. Habitat for Humanity Cluj

Habitat for Humanity started as a series of voluntary projects undertaken by the philanthropic couple of Linda and Millard Fuller in Georgia, USA. The organization expanded and currently it has headquarters in 75 countries. In Romania, Habitat has eight offices and the Cluj office was founded in 1999. Small-sized, the Cluj Habitat team has 10 employees and over 204 local, corporate and international volunteers in 2012 alone¹¹.

As every other Habitat office, this one too benefits from an initial funding from the rotating fund which is obtained from the amounts paid by beneficiaries from another office in the country. Besides this, Habitat receives a series of private/corporate donations, funds from the 2% mechanism and in-kind donations (construction material). Social enterprise is available through the sales of promotional Habitat material.

Regarding communication techniques, the organization is present in every social media page, has an updated website and newsletter subscription is possible. Moreover, volunteers are being coordinated through a Facebook page called Habiteam, where they can interact and find out updates available exclusively for them.

¹¹ The following information is drawn from my personal experiences as a Habitat employee and updated with data received in 2013.

In order to conclude on how INGOs are different in their structures than local grassroots, the quote of an international volunteer on a Habitat building site is used: “it is so much easier for international organizations to settle in a new location because they already have an organizational structure to implement; all they have to do is adapt to local specificities. Their greatest benefit is the creation of worldwide webs of NGOs that link civil societies everywhere, forming a global community based on mutual help”.

3.3. Personal assessment of the interview data

The interview consisted out of nine questions. While some of the interviewees were keen on giving a lot of information about their work, others were answering strictly to the questions, hence the discrepancies between the six texts. Despite the fact that Eastern European realities are incomparable to American ones, the internet brought local grassroots ideas and perspectives that would not have appeared otherwise.

A highly relevant fact discovered in this research is the expertise difference between small town associations and those located in bigger cities: if grassroots in Hunedoara were formed because of ordinary citizen's desire to improve, transform or preserve something, the reviewed organizations from Cluj and Bucharest were founded by experts, professionals and had a very clear purpose. This difference in know-how is clearly a factor that keeps DAO and ASC from developing into prominent NGOs. Social enterprise is undertaken in most of the organizations assessed, but not at the level Fried (2012) illustrated in her case studies: the social economy activities Romanian grassroots undertake are just aiding schemes to help them survive, while the American example shows examples of entrepreneurs implementing complicated plans to improve the lives of socially disadvantaged groups. Moreover, grassroots can take the examples of Civitas and Habitat in planning their work in projects and the advantages it brings as strategic planning represents the future in the nonprofit industry too.

As we seen, the impact of social media and the internet is huge on every organization assessed. Not only it is a useful communication tool, but it often becomes a virtual fundraising venue and a place of reuniting volunteers and activists. Currently ASC and DAO are highly active on Facebook, but both organizations' activities would benefit from an official website, which for a very small amount of money would state their formalization and give them more credit in the eyes of possible donors. Moreover, even if D.B. (founder of DAO) looks at social media with a doubtful eye as he articulates that “on the internet people say something, while in reality they do the opposite”, I feel that –just as in Scott Harrison's case – this might be the answer to some fundraising: while walking from our meeting point to the location of our interview, D.B. was constantly greeted and saluted by people, which leads me to the thought that he is a

charismatic figure, characteristic that usually gives great figures of leadership. Receiving foreign aid came with conditions that sometimes were requirements of modernization.

On the other hand, the entire Romanian nonprofit sector still has some milestones to reach. Mentioning again what A.B. from ASC says, the process of registration is time consuming, sponsorship is hard to reach due to entangled legislation and every sponsor comes with a request thus staying truthful to the organization's mission becomes a fight. The great advantage these organizations portray is their immediate closeness to the community: they are part of the community they emerged from, volunteer adhesion is frequent and many of them are in fruitful collaborations with each other. Alone ASC's innovative measure of lending their volunteers to other causes is groundbreaking.

What's more, the assessed entities all show a touch of eccentricity, they all have big projects in mind and their actions are undertaken by youngsters. Open to partnerships, these grassroots do not want to sell themselves in exchange for funding, but would rather pursue traditional methods of funding. The example of Civitas, who in its 21 years of existence, has thrived and survived is a clear example that grassroots have a future in Romania. Hence, in my opinion, grassroots' current main chore is to themselves and then to the community they are serving: acquiring know-how and expertise. As we could see, both Creative Room and PlusMinus' quality and work grew to this feature.

Finally, some recommendations need to be made in order to portray how international practices would improve Romanian local grassroots:

- More public-NGO partnership needs to be undertaken and even co-production if the communities in which grassroots activate require it; in this case, the Corvin Supporters Associations has a "golden star" as they are now the coordinator of all sports-youth programs in the locality.
- Authorities need to show some more responsibility towards nonprofits: most grassroots encounter difficulties from their starting point – if public administration cannot issue a national system to fund these entities, the least they can do is to give NGOs a space where they can perform their social activities.
- Easier access to structural funding: this was the most frequent request encountered in previous research as well (Gala Societatii Civile 2010).
- Amending the legislation concerning NGOs.
- Stimulating and promoting volunteering: due to the communist past, many age groups are reluctant to work unpaid.

Final remarks

America provides great examples of voluntary organizations and philanthropy. It is the home of almost all innovations in nonprofit sector. Grassroots emerged from within this American background and it is them who evolved into hybrid organizations. On the thought that these models can transform Romanian grassroots, this study assessed six NGOs from the perspective of fundraising, communication, HR and volunteering and future plans.

The Romanian voluntary sector has plenty of deficiencies. Even if the communist past has destroyed some of the associative spirit that had taken hundreds of years to build, the registered number of NGOs nowadays is ever-growing; this, however, does not necessarily mean that all these associations work in the service of community. The paper revealed that even if there are some improvements, there is still a long way to go for the studied organizations. The wide use of the internet and the attraction of young, talented and expert volunteers provide contemporary Romanian grassroots leverage over other nonprofits and ensures them modalities to remain active many years from now. Moreover, Open Society Foundations' initiative of creating a European network of grassroots opened up Romanian organizations the possibility of being connected with nonprofits they can learn from. However, the fact that all organizations just follow a pattern of obtaining structural funding that is invested in the development of the organization and community service shows that these entities are still reluctant to experimenting because of the risk to fail; this too can be considered an inheritance of the communist regime.

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