NADACE VIA
COMMUNITY
ALPHABET

You come into a community where neighbors are chatting, two people are painting benches on the village square and children are practicing a play for a community festival day. There are freshly planted flowers on the square and the place looks well-cared for. Tables loaded with cakes are in place and a huge pig-roasting grill has been fired up. You can feel that people really love living there, and you feel at home as soon as you set foot on the square.

How many communities in your country look like this? In our experience, there is something missing. The communities could look like this though...

Through the Community alphabet program we will guide three organizations so they can better support communities in the CEE **to become places where everybody wants to move to and live for the rest of their lives**.

Background
As people close themselves off in bubbles where they confirm their own opinions, they become less willing to engage in constructive dialogue about common issues with people from other bubbles. Trust between people suffers in this environment. On the local level there is then little will to work collaboratively to improve the community. Although this problem is not exclusive to Central and Eastern Europe, it is particularly visible in this region partially because of its recent past, i.e. the Communist era during which the state assumed all responsibility for public affairs and trust between people was suppressed.

We focused on these issues in Via's previous international program, ViabilityNet, a nine-year long effort that guided CEE organizations and community leaders.

Based on this experience we have developed a theoretical framework containing:
- Asset-based Community Development (ABCD)
- the community resilience framework
- Well-functioning community as described by John W. Gardner

Program concept
In this new program, participants will learn about these approaches while also discovering the **potential of diversity**, i.e. the ability to engage various types of people and groups equally and understanding otherness, whether it is based on culture, education or life circumstances, so that they are able to support communities in perceiving diversity as an asset rather than a threat. We will help them integrate this thinking into the programming of their organizations.

In the 2020-2022 programming period we are working with three organizations. They support communities in Serbia, the Czech Republic and Hungary (TRAG Foundation, Via Foundation and the HACD-Hungarian Association for Community Development). All three are national-level organizations and provide a key source of support for community leaders.

Target group
We will work with:
- program managers who influence programming in the three organizations
- consultants/guides who advise community leaders/groups/initiatives

Both support the secondary target group of community leaders, who in turn support the final target group of communities.

Activities
The key program activities are:
- <u>Survey visits</u> to the three organizations to gather baseline data for program content development
- <u>Three 3-day trainings</u> in ABCD, the resilient communities framework and diversity sensitivity for program managers and consultants from Via, HACD, TRAG, including practical application of the learning in between trainings
- <u>Series of individual consultations</u> to these 3 organizations in applying this thinking throughout their activities
- <u>Mentoring these 3 organizations</u> in how to transfer/share the ABCD, resilience and diversity sensitivity approaches to additional consultants in the CZ, HU and RS
- <u>Facilitating connections</u> between engagement consultants to provide mutual support in these topics

There will be two rounds of the program, one in 2020 and the second in 2021.

Changes
How will this work with program managers and consultants from HACD, TRAG and Via help the most important target group, the communities supported by these organizations?

By making changes to their programming and direct interaction in communities, consultants and program managers will be able to guide community leaders in discovering what local resources a community has, mapping and using them; in seeing the ways in which people in a community are connected or disconnected, how willing and able they are to learn and adapt as a group, and understanding what this means for development of the community; and in thinking about the community's identity, who is part of it and who isn't, and what diversity exists within their community and how they can work with that diversity.

Most importantly, what's in it for the communities?

All of this will help communities develop into places where:
- people with different opinions and lifestyles work towards shared community goals in an environment of listening, trust, respect and mutual recognition;
- people thrive on a shared yet inclusive identity and strong sense of belonging;
- people enhance the community through use of local skills and resources; and
- people assume shared responsibility and want to stay.

  = the antithesis of societal fragmentation at the community level.