

REPORT

European Volunteering Capital Candidates Community (EVCCC) Seminar “Collaborative Communities”

*How volunteering reflects European Values, promotes diversity and defends rights:
Cooperation of the public and the volunteering sector to meet future challenges*

2 October 2023: [Hotel Lero](#)
Dubrovnik, Croatia

On 2 October 2023, in Dubrovnik (Croatia), CEV hosted the European Volunteering Capital Candidates Community Seminar, which saw the participation of **101** citizens from more than 20 countries from Europe, including 41 males, 59 females, 1 non-binary person.

CEV President Lejla Šehić Relić and **Helge Klouman Marstrander, Deputy Head of Mission from the Embassy of Norway** welcomed the participants and gave introductory speeches focussing on the important role of volunteering as an expression of European Values and democracy.



In the first part of the Seminar four speakers presented **Best practices for collaborative communities**.

Natasza Kozłowska from the State Volunteer Agency Berlin talked about their activities as a volunteer agency and a recent project “One-Stop-Agency and home for education for volunteering structures”. The agency offers its own training courses on diversity orientation and board work, volunteer management and volunteer coordination in refugee shelters. Their services are aimed primarily at volunteer coordinators, volunteer managers and board members, but also at other interested parties from civil society and public administration. They are working on the **Democracy Promotion Act** in Berlin and updating the **Berlin Engagement Strategy** as a joint process of evaluation of state planning and civil society. Find the presentation [here](#).



She was followed by **Maj Morgenstjerne from Aarhus Municipality**. Via [video message](#) she underlined that they published a paper-recommendations on how the city should develop in future in terms of volunteering. They created this in a participatory way, in collaboration with the commune and other CSOs. They also created a digital portal [Social Kompass](#), a place where citizens can seek help for their current life situation, volunteer organisations and municipal issues. Citizens can search for different volunteer opportunities. [FriSe](#) has, via Financial Act funds, been given the responsibility to spread Social Kompass locally in 40 municipalities during 2022 and towards 2026.



Trygve Fættén and Tanja Plasil from Trondheim Municipality presented the Volunteer Policy Plan 2023-2027. Trondheim municipality will strengthen interaction and co-creation with volunteers, based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. They must ensure a good framework and structure for volunteering and promote volunteering (increase knowledge and interest). Both speakers underlined that Trondheim's 14 voluntary centres have cooperation agreements with the municipality. The agreements ensures continuous operation and development of the volunteer centres, ensures predictability and stability, ensures constructive collaboration based on equality between partners and raises awareness for the importance of volunteering and volunteer centres among employees of Trondheim Municipality in particular and citizens in general. Find the presentation [here](#).

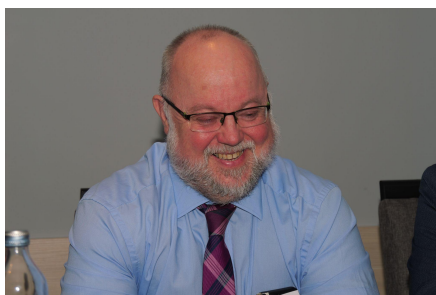


Ilana Gotz from Trento Municipality showcased participatory community development and urban beautification cases from Trento. She presented the “Regulation for the care of urban commons”. It is a regulation “for shared management - the municipality and the citizens work together to share in the care and regeneration of the city” she stated. They have signed 104 “Collaboration Pacts” from 2016 to 2023 with the CSOs, to share responsibilities for the collective good. They promote engagement through public calls for contribution to specific projects as well as projects that emerge from citizen proposals: community gardens,

activities in public parks, sports activities. She highlighted a particular cooperation between a middle school, social cooperative working with people with disabilities and the municipality to create a herb garden in a city park. Find the presentation [here](#).



The second part of the Seminar was **Panel Discussion - What is the future and role of volunteering in building collaborative communities?** It was moderated by the CEV President Lejla Šehić Relić and the panellists were: Gabriella Civico, CEV Director, Damian Kuźmiński from Gdańsk Municipality and Friedemann Walther from Berlin Municipality & Jurgen Grotz from the Institute for Volunteering Research.



The discussion led to conclusions that "Collaborative Communities" refers to taking a proactive approach that emphasises cooperation, open communication and co-creation, among stakeholders from various sectors. In addition, it spotlights the importance of recognizing volunteers as key stakeholders in improving society, promoting social cohesion, and fostering dialogue. The speakers highlighted the need for cross-sector collaboration and a deep understanding of volunteering's transformative effect from all concerned. They emphasised that only by working together can the most pressing challenges be suitably addressed in order to create inclusive and resilient communities that harness the power of

volunteering for sustainable development and social change. Volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and volunteer infrastructure organisations need to be implicated as key stakeholders in improving society in collaboration with actors from other sectors.

The fact that volunteering provides a unique response to societal challenges was agreed and also that volunteers should not be depicted as “amateurs” playing a side role to “professional” employees but rather a complementary approach adding value as a unique resource in our communities. The need for policy makers to understand, not only the practical outputs of volunteering, but also the role that volunteering has to play in social cohesion, in interpersonal relationships, in bringing people together and keeping the communication and dialogue open between ourselves and each other - making European values a reality in a context of democracy was stressed. The examples shared from Berlin and Gdansk clearly illustrated the power and benefits of this approach.



The great need, especially in central and eastern Europe in both EU and non-EU countries, to better demonstrate the value of volunteering and civic engagement, especially with the trend towards more euro-scepticism and shrinking civic space continues, was a pertinent point in the exchanges. It was noted that in many of the countries in the region, civic space and civil society organisations are under attack from some public authorities at different levels as well as from some sections of the media which can often lead to a lack of understanding of the role of volunteering and civil society amongst the general population and for policy makers themselves (from across the political spectrum and including those in power and opposition).

The fact that volunteering is an important part of community resilience was another aspect of the discussion. Speakers pointed out that it is crucial for volunteering to be an integral part of the community planning for crisis prevention and response and that volunteering in crisis situations needs special attention, planning and organisation. Furthermore, the ability to provide quality, long term and sustainable impact, as well as appropriate responses to community needs, requires volunteering organisations to be stable, well-established and well-regarded not only in the community, but also and particularly, by local, regional and national authorities. Panellists agreed that pre-existing and trustful cross-sector collaboration has proved crucial in enabling communities to respond to existing and new requests for help and assistance.

As highlighted by the representatives from EV Capital Candidate Community (EVCCC) in the panel, good cross-sector collaboration at the local level between the public and private sectors (profit and not for profit), for communities of all sizes and situations, has high potential as a driver of value creation that is crucial for sustainable development, as well as for disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Other speakers pointed out that the continued lack of coordination at the EU level regarding volunteering programmes, policies and data gathering however, makes it impossible to have a realistic assessment and measure of the true transformative effect of volunteering in Europe.

Jurgen Grotz from the Institute for Volunteering Research shared evidence collected by the Institute for over two decades, illustrating how volunteer initiatives can impact the formation of collaborative communities but that their role may not be constant. He stated that we are witnessing changes in social orders and in international collaboration around the world. The values of the European Union: Human dignity, Freedom, Democracy, Equality, Rule of law and Human rights, reflect a gallant ambition, but governments seem to be struggling to always translate these values comprehensively in all communities. He reflected on whether governments are now looking at communities to do it for themselves? He quoted Andy Haldane, the former Chief Economist of the Bank of England reminding us that “Our societies thrived for many, many millennia before anything recognisably like either the market or the state appeared on the scene.” He suggested that there are two sides to this coin. On the one hand it is clear that communities can collaborate without the help of the State and gave examples of the past with faith-based organisations running hospitals, professional guilds organising training, farmers forming co-operatives and of course people organising social events preserving arts and culture together. The other side, however, can be that today the State either seeks to direct such activities or might want to co-opt them and place previously governmental responsibilities on communities.

As well as being an essential component for European democracy and an expression of European Values, volunteering as a unique setting for civic education, and an important space for acquisition of skills and competences was also a focus of the discussion. The enormous contribution of volunteering to social inclusion was underlined and that volunteering itself needs to become more accessible to people of different backgrounds, ages and diverse personal situations was also reflected on. The need to ensure that quality volunteering experiences for new and existing volunteers can be properly prepared and have access to quality training for their roles, including content that will help them to understand how volunteering contributes to the common good, was emphasised along with the need for the active engagement of diverse groups of citizens, both in practical actions and in policy development leading to systemic change, were considered crucial in the context of Collaborative Communities.

Following the panel discussion, the EV Capital 2025 Candidates: [Avilés \(Presentation\)](#), [Mechelen \(Presentation\)](#), [Salamanca \(Presentation\)](#) Municipalities presented their

candidatures. Their videos were shown and they each gave more details about their approaches and strategies for supporting volunteers and volunteering and how they align with the priorities in the Blueprint for European Volunteer 2030. The candidates were thanked for their contributions and it was reminded that the announcement of the winning candidate will take place at the closing ceremony of the Trondheim #EVCapital2023 on 5 December 2023.



Annex 1

AGENDA

16:30 - 17:00	Welcome Coffee
17:00 - 17:10	Introduction and welcome: Helge Klouman Marstrander, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Norway Lejla Šehić Relić - CEV President
17:10 - 18:00	Best practice for Collaborate Communities presentations: Natasza Kozłowska - State Volunteer Agency Berlin Maj Morgenstjerne - Aarhus Municipality Trygve Fætten and Tanja Plasil - Trondheim Municipality Ilana Gotz - Trento Municipality
18:00 - 19:00	Panel Discussion - What is the future and role of volunteering in building collaborative communities? Moderator: Lejla Šehić Relić, CEV President Speakers: Gabriella Civico - CEV Director Damian Kuźmiński - Gdańsk Municipality Friedemann Walther - Berlin Municipality Jurgen Grotz - Institute for Volunteering Research
19:00 - 20:00	EV Capital 2025 Candidates presentations Avilés - Pelayo García García, Councillor Citizen Participation Mechelen - Bas Dhoey, Coordinator of Social Cohesion and Hanne Heuts, Project Officer Salamanca - María Almudena Parres Cabrera, Deputy Mayor
20:00	Reception / Networking cocktail