



## CASE STUDY

# Understanding diversity beyond labels

This case study was developed by Glopolis and it captures the story of the most significant change that happened to the civil society organisations (CSOs) network thanks to the Stronger Roots Program. The network was awarded EUR 16,670 under the project and was provided with 46 hours of capacity development support.

### Networks

Network for Protection of Democracy

### Country

Czech Republic

### Period when the change was observed

January 2021 – September 2021

# The most significant change that the network achieved

The Network for Protection of Democracy (NPD) connects organisations and individuals who want to safeguard democracy in the Czech Republic. Even though the network has no political affiliation, the Network coordinators expected it to be viewed as a liberal project that would likely attract mostly liberally-minded organisations and individuals.

Since its public launch in 2020, the network has had difficulty organically engaging people with conservative views and those from outlying regions of the country. Seeking to better **represent varied political views and socio-economic contexts** in Czech society, it set out to expand and diversify its membership base by approaching new types of organisations (associations, companies, informal groupings, etc.), with different interests (education, environment, social, etc.) and/or ideological orientations (liberal and conservative attitudes).

and why it was used. To a large extent, the network coordinators realised, the label served the purpose of identifying “the other” – the other who is less likely to join the NPD and whose worldviews and lived experience of democracy the NPD tends to be less in touch with. Next, the NPD identified and approached organisations whose representatives were less likely to join the network on their own, and especially those who openly claim allegiance to and/or actively advocate for conservative values.



*“We found new members who carry conservative values through their work – and we rely on them as important hubs for information-sharing in all corners of the Czech Republic, while having the confidence that the information they share to their communities won’t be a priori perceived or rejected as politicised or potentially divisive.”*

*Vendula Menšíková, Network for Protection of Democracy*

The most significant change was a **new understanding and approach to “conservative” organisations**. The network began by examining what it meant by this label,

Looking more closely into this subsector of civil society led the NPD to **define various types of organisations**, with stronger roots crucial for the protection of democracy at

all levels in fact – a more robust base, support, reach and practical impact in communities at the very local level.

These organisations may uphold conservative values in a different way: by maintaining traditions and contributing to strong community ties and continuity. They may be anchored all across the Czech Republic, are often local/grassroots and **tend to have a strong connection with the place and its people**, but do not necessarily engage in political issues or identify themselves as conservative. From the perspective of the network, their rootedness in dense community ties marked by strong trust is essential for spreading information towards the public.

## How the project contributed to the change

By understanding the label and mapping the “conservative” terrain, the NPD realised that it had originally wanted

to bring “conservative” organisations into the network to achieve a hypothetical and largely symbolic milestone in expanding the network’s diversity. The point had been to **prevent the NPD from locking itself in a bubble of like-minded organisations** at a time when the membership base was small and prospective members closely examined who the existing members were.

The NPD was able to now consider its **true, longer-term needs in regard to “conservative membership”**, and it realised that organisations/clubs with strong ties to places and local communities were the ones to approach. Their membership enables the NPD to spread information key to democracy protection to members of the public in the various corners of the Czech Republic.

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**The Stronger Roots** Program is jointly implemented by a consortium created by Open Society Fund Prague (CZ), Open Society Foundation Bratislava (SK), Glopolis (CZ) and the NIOK Foundation (HU). The Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate. Within the Program, the concept of transversal collaboration was developed and tested on 9 networks of civil society organizations.

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**Glopolis** is an analytical and networking center with an 18-years long outstanding think-tank experience in research, policy monitoring, advocacy and campaigning, relationship development, resource mobilization and facilitating collaboration at the Czech, CEE and EU-wide levels. Glopolis mission is to support transversal collaboration beyond the non-profit sector towards resilient civil society and sustainable democracy. Therefore, it seeks out and expands the field of shared aspirations of the CSOs, governmental and business representatives and engages them in solving common, societal challenges.