



CASE STUDY

Youth and religious values renew the Hungarian green movement

This case study was developed by Glopolis and it captures the story of the most significant change that happened to the CSO network thanks to the Stronger Roots Program. The network was awarded EUR 10,000 under the project and was provided with 26 hours of capacity development support.

Network

Hungarian Green NGO Cooperation

Country

Hungary

Period when the change was observed

1/9/2020 – 31/12/2021

The most significant change that the network achieved

The Hungarian Green NGO Cooperation network, which has been connecting environmental NGOs in Hungary for 30 years, is the widest informal network in the country's green sector. Despite its size, two types of environmental groups have been largely absent from its membership base: religious and youth environmental groups. The network recognized this **gap in its social base** and also wanted **to address the current government's criticism** that the environmental movement is a leftist phenomenon that does not represent society as a whole.

The network sought to **engage religious and youth groups** traditionally underrepresented in its membership in order to **respond to diverse societal needs,**

strengthen its advocacy capacity and reach a wider audience. The network also hoped that bringing in these groups would introduce new knowledge, momentum and innovative ideas to stimulate the renewal of the environmental cooperation movement.

Through Stronger Roots, the network strengthened its ties to a number of religious and youth groups working on environmental advocacy and climate change. It **expanded its membership base and board diversity** and also **introduced new values, opportunities and ways of working** that will make the network more resilient as it looks forward to its next 30 years. 4 people from the newly involved groups joined the network's board and the religious groups' values, such as political neutrality or God's creation approach to environmental protection, were incorporated into the network.

Organising events together also led the **newly engaged groups to become more deeply involved in the advocacy campaigns of other environmental NGOs.** Several religious organisations signed a petition against the national oil company's plans to extract oil in a national park; the campaign was successful and the oil company



7

religious organisations and youth groups became members



6

newly participating groups took part in the organisation of the network's annual meeting



300+

participants from environmental NGOs in the network's annual meeting



4

new network's board members

withdrew its plans. Many religious schools joined decentralised World Climate March events to apply pressure on decision makers before the Glasgow UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26). Lutheran and Catholic groups joined Friends of the Earth Hungary's campaign for a weekly meatless day in schools.

Youth groups also increased their involvement in traditional environmental NGOs' awareness-raising campaigns. Fridays for Future organised a demonstration for the protection of Fertő Lake, where the government has built a huge hotel in a nature conservation area.

How the project contributed to the change

Individual and group interviews were held with 25 people from 4 religious organisations and 3 youth groups to better understand their needs, approaches and thinking. For example it was found out they are ready to join policy declarations if it is politically neutral, or that young people can be attracted by young people – therefore the young staff of recent network members should be contact persons.

After, several religious and youth groups became involved in organising network events, **and as a result the events were designed to meet the needs of all of the groups involved.** There was a webinar with the

newly involved youth groups, where initiatives presented their work to one another; the young people from the youth groups were entrusted with organisation of the entire event, at their request.

Six of the newly participating religious and youth groups also **took part in the preparation and organisation of the network's annual meeting**, which draws 300+ participants from environmental NGOs. During the three-day event, there were seven specific programmes related to the religious environmental groups' work. Network board elections were also held at the annual meeting; 4 of the 12 new members are from the newly involved religious and youth groups.



“Working more closely with new partners will better serve sustainability efforts in Hungary, as cooperation with youth groups will boost recruitment of new volunteers, activists and staff members for environmental NGOs and energise these organisations with the young people’s dynamism and creativity.”

Csaba Lajtmann, Hungarian Climate Alliance

By organising the events together, people from the traditional environmental NGOs and the newly involved religious and youth groups began to network and work together. The youth organisations pointed out areas where the network could improve, such as communication, and **shared innovative techniques** such as how to make creative Instagram posts. Based on the youth groups' ideas, the network will invest more energy into social

media platforms and develop an online voting system for network members. The new groups also benefited, with the religious groups learning about new environmental education methods and ideas and the youth groups becoming more professional and effective.

The network learned that **involving partner groups in event planning from the very beginning deepens their commitment**, and that looser forms of coordination and more frequent and visible communication are needed.

Why is the change important

The changes increased the resilience of Hungarian Green NGO Cooperation by expanding the network across new target groups. They broadened the constituency of the Hungarian environmental community and diversified the social background and advocacy potential.



Community cooking at the network's annual meeting
Photo by FoE Hungary

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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.

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.