



Since 2012, NESEHNUTI has been devoting itself through its Initiative Way program to supporting civic initiatives in the South Caucasus. We are currently active in **Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia**; we also cooperate with non-governmental organizations in post-conflict areas such as **Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh**. Since 2014 we have also been working in Ukraine.

Civic initiatives and the non-profit sector in developing countries, including many countries of the former Soviet Union, often lack knowhow and experience with the successful, effective management of independent social, environmental and human rights campaigns and activities.

Politically problematic and partially isolated territories (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and others) **suffer from a lack of educational opportunities** in the field of civic activities and from poorly-functioning international cooperation.

Ukraine is facing **a high level of corruption** and inadequate compliance with its adopted reform laws or new rules at all levels. Solutions to social and ecological problems are particularly undermined by referring to the conflict in the east of the country. Civic campaigns led by local initiatives can be an effective instrument for increasing transparency or enforcing compliance with rules already adopted. In Ukraine we support civic initiatives in regions that are rather outside the main interest of large foreign organizations and donors.

Celebration of the 40th birthday and the release of the Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismail, 2015. Photo: Majda Slámová



Our goal abroad is to support **active citizens and their initiatives**. We want to be helpful in extending rights and freedoms, developing participation in public affairs and the functioning of independent media. In cooperation with local organizations we want to contribute to the development of **courageous, critical, authentic grassroots groups**.

We emphasize the promotion of **human rights, environmental protection, animal rights and a tolerant society**. We try to reduce the influence of xenophobic, militaristic and intolerant ideologies.

We support initiatives in the form of expert consultations, campaign planning, and training or organizing internships, in the beginning also financially. As a result, **positive changes in civil society are achieved and attention is drawn to topics that may be marginalized in a particular country's context**, from animal rights protection to the inclusion of Roma minorities.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

"Happening" in support of politically persecuted persons, including journalists in Azerbaijan, 2014.



We support independent journalism as a pillar of a functional democracy. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia, a region inhabited mostly by the Armenian minority, we helped journalists **to plan and run a news portal**. Thanks to this portal, local people are informed about developments in the country in their native language, thus overcoming a significant barrier to better engagement in Georgian society. In Abkhazia we supported an independent journalist initiative that carried out a successful campaign for **free access to information**. In Ukraine we helped equip a regional editorial office of **the independent online Hromadske.TV channel**. We have thus supported the expansion of media coverage from being concentrated in the center to working in other parts of the country.

We also do not forget about journalists from countries where freedom of speech is under pressure. As part of a campaign to support political prisoners in Azerbaijan, we supported the release of the prominent investigative journalist Khadija Ismail through a "happening" there.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM



Akhalkalaki, where JNews operates, 2017.

The mountainous parts of Georgia are usually economically very weak – especially if they are not attractive to tourists. An even more complicated situation exists in **the Samtskhe-Javakheti area in southern Georgia**, where the mighty crest of the Little Caucasus unfolds. A large Armenian minority lives there who mostly do not speak Georgian. Their predominant livelihood is potato growing and cattle farming, as the mountain area does not offer many other opportunities.

After an important editorial office shut down in the town of Akhaltsikhe, **the local Armenian community finds itself almost without a source of information in an accessible language**. In the nearby town of Akhalkalaki, however, **a group of five women decided to establish an online media platform**. Despite major obstacles and initial failures, they managed to start something that many media outlets can only dream about. Over a short period, JNews has developed a huge local following because they are one of a very few sources of information that covers topics ranging from social issues and cultural events to human rights or environmental cases. As the journalists themselves say, when the local government sometimes does not know what urgent issue to tackle, they open the JNews site.



Planning joint activities of organizations and initiatives dealing with the Roma minority in Tbilisi, Georgia, 2017.

Through an open call (if this is possible in the given country or territory), we address the widest possible range of citizens' initiatives and ask them to submit their campaign for a micro-grant call. We select those that best respond to the micro-grant call, those that plan to **pursue ambitious civic campaigns**.

Using our experience, we help initiatives **to plan concrete civic campaigns**. The initiatives themselves choose the topic according to their preferences and to what they consider important in their community. We "limit" them only by the focus of the specific micro-grant call challenge and by emphasizing NESEHNUTI priorities (emphasis on civic participation, strengthening of independent media, right to information, women's rights and environmental protection).

After planning the civic campaigns, **we remain in touch with the initiatives** and approximately once every two months we consult them in regards to the specific steps in their campaigns. During the implementation of the campaigns, we meet with the initiatives personally several times. Since 2011, **we have succeeded in supporting over a hundred civic initiatives in the Caucasus and Ukraine**.

Sukhum/i, 2017, plot where a dog shelter will stand.




You can recognize Sukhum/i, a town on the Black Sea coast, by its palm tree colonnade where families with children stroll – and among them, **dogs that do not belong to anyone**. They are not aggressive, but they roam the streets, often sick or thin. One of the unfortunate laws of present-day Abkhazia meant to deal with this situation allows the culling of stray dogs. An initiative group consisting of several active people – lawyers, teachers and entrepreneurs – has stood up against this. Together, they are leading **a campaign to convince Abkhazia to set aside money for a humane solution to the situation rather than culling**. They began negotiating about shelter construction and managed to acquire a plot for that purpose outside of town. They involved the public, who is helping them with material and financial support. They engaged a veterinarian who, from the micro-grant funds, obtained equipment for the vaccination and castration of the dogs. **Soon the construction of the shelter will begin**. The group is now negotiating that funds will go to shelter management and the care of the dogs. We believe you will soon meet only healthy, cheerful dogs with their new owners walking on the embankment of Sukhum/i.

FOR THE RIGHTS OF STRAY DOGS



Part of our support is organizing internships or study trips for participants from the South Caucasus or Ukraine. In the Czech Republic, for example, we organize **study trips for independent journalists from both Ukraine and Caucasus**, during which they have the opportunity to gain experience and contacts with Czech media.

Thanks to our **long-term cooperation with these initiatives** by supporting their campaigns, organizing these study trips, and providing educational activities and expert consultations, these initiatives are able **to conduct positive changes in civil society** and highlight topics that may be marginalized in the context of the given country. At the same time, civil society actors get to know each other and network, despite the complicated political situation in the South Caucasus. For several years, thanks to our study trips, we have been able to mediate contacts between representatives of initiatives from the South Caucasus, including from areas that are separated by borders resulting from armed conflicts. In addition, **the transfer of good practice between countries** and establishment of long-term working relations also develops.



Minorities 2017 – Participants on the field trip shoot interviews for a film in the village of Gachiani.

Liaman (not her real name) comes from Azerbaijan. **She is studying journalism at a university in Tbilisi**; she can no longer work for the non-profit organization in Baku where she originally was active because it has been closed, just like most other such organizations. Many people involved with nonprofits have been charged with anti-state activities, drug possession, or financial fraud in fabricated trials. Liaman used the internship with NESEHNUTI to learn more about minorities living in Georgia who deal with a variety of difficulties. Last but not least, **she also wanted to meet people who are active in the field of minority rights protection** and of socially or otherwise excluded groups.

During two weeks, she and 20 other participants visited a number of organizations that support minority rights in the South Caucasus. She could see how difficult life was for internally displaced persons who, in the early 1990s, had been forced to leave their homes as a result of military conflicts and who still live in the provisional dwellings of the formerly Soviet spa complexes where they “temporarily” settled at that time. She observed the complex life of minorities in mountain towns or on the secluded, run-down outskirts of towns and cities. She learnt how deep people’s stories are, she tasted a bit of their daily bread. As she herself has pointed out, **the trip helped her to realize how complicated the issue of cohabitation among different minorities are**, and how necessary it is not to close oneself off inside a shell of stereotypes, but to listen to people’s life stories.

FIELD TRIP “MINORITIES IN EVERYDAY REALITY”



BarCamp in Kutaisi, Georgia, 2017. Photo: Antonin Jelinek

During the implementation of the campaigns we also organize other events for the initiatives we support and for others who are interested. These events aim **to inspire people to be civically engaged**, to share contacts, expertise, and so on. Among such events are **BarCamps, conferences full of workshops, lectures for civic sector actors** who exchange experiences and learn. For example, in March 2017, we organized, in cooperation with our Georgian partners and a local university, a second BarCamp in the **Georgian city of Kutaisi** with the participation of almost 100 people. In 2017 we organized the third Ukrainian-Czech BarCamp in Kherson, Ukraine. In 2018 we organized the first BarCamp in Armenia together with a local organization.

CONFERENCE



A “BarCamp” does not involve camping in tents, nor is it a chat in a bar where one falls off the bar stool and into a sleeping bag. The term refers to the format of an open, informal conference where the difference between audience and speakers is blurred. **Brisk blocks of presentations and workshops** run in parallel were originally used in the field of information technologies. Nonetheless, the format is equally good for support of the civil sector. NESEHNUTI has organized this kind of “nonconference” several times. For three days, Kutaisi, the second largest Georgian city, became a nest of **inspirational and active people from all over the South Caucasus** attending together with people from **Ukraine, Russia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia**. The topics stirring up discussion until the early morning hours were equally stimulating. What are the problems the South Caucasus faces and what should be done about them? How can we produce committed journalism? How can we combat propaganda and reveal it for what it is? How can we work in repressive regimes and not lose our strength?

Ofelya Zalyan works in a human rights organization in Armenia. During her BarCamp block, she talked about the problem of missing persons. For 25 years, some people in Armenia have been waking up at night at the slightest noise, waiting for their missing relatives who fought in the war of Nagorno-Karabakh to come home. Not only is there not a single social support program for the relatives of the deceased, there is also no law that would allow long-term missing persons to be declared dead. Thanks to this organization, however, the struggle for a humane approach to these sensitive human issues continues.

MAGDALENA



Part of our activities are funded by grants from Czech and foreign donors, but this support is very limited and can be unstable. In order to be truly independent and **to support activist-type initiatives**, we need the help of donors large and small. In the past we have been able to get support from people who are trying to improve the human rights situation in Ukraine and the South Caucasus.

If you wish to support our work with activists in Ukraine and the Caucasus, you can do so by sending your donation to our transparent bank account:

Bank account: **2600013234**

IBAN: **CZ8520100000002600013234**

BIC/SWIFT: **FIOBCZPPXXX**

Only together with you can we build a strong civil society across all our countries.

NESEHNUTI