

– WE CAN BE **HEROES** –

Exploring Europe for a better world

THOMAS TICHADOU

2018

A portrait of a woman with curly brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a white top. She is smiling slightly. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a pink flower in the bottom right corner.

HERO #5

**MOBILIZING
CREATIVE
COMMUNITIES**

with MARTA

THE PROJECT 1/2

« Polish society is getting older, so there's a real need to take care of the elderly. That's why we develop Seniors in action, an incubator for projects solving senior issues. »

CAN YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF ?

I'm Marta Bialek-Graczyk, I'm a sociologist, journalist and director of [E, association of Creative Initiatives](#).

WHAT'S THE CONCEPT BEHIND E, ASSOCIATION OF CREATIVE INITIATIVES ?

We use different methods to help people in their local community to do something connected with culture, intergenerational issues, civic education, public space or art.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM YOU WANT TO TACKLE ?

Polish society is getting older, so there's a real need to take care of the elderly. That's why we develop Seniors in action, an incubator for projects solving senior issues. We allocate grants, our mentors support them and we organize workshops and networking sessions. Our program is totally free for our 37 project promoters we help. For example, an idea I really like is about cycling : in a small town in Poland, citizens are crazy about it. So entrepreneurs invented taxi and delivery services with citizens. They convinced young people to ride bicycles and deliver some stuff seniors need or just drive them somewhere with a special chair.

THE PROJECT 2/2

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FOR YOU, HOW IS IT INNOVATIVE ?

An innovative idea is smart and not so expensive. Things we all know, but in a new pattern. Everybody knows cycling and everybody knows the elderly have some dependency problems. But nobody thinks that you can combine both topics : that's innovative !

« I wanted to make something useful for the common good. I simply hit the road with friends. »

HOW WAS THE PROJECT BORN ? WHY HAVE YOU DECIDED TO CREATE THIS NGO ?

When I was younger, I wanted to make something useful for the common good. I simply hit the road with friends, took our car to meet and help small communities. We proposed different kinds of workshops to maximize their social impact. After a while, we moved to another place and we started our support again. We created E, association of Creative Initiatives. "E" is a typical Polish letter, it's quite unique. We didn't have much money to create our own logo, so we decided to use this letter as our logo. We travelled all around Poland for 2 years.

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THE BUSINESS MODEL

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR ECONOMIC MODEL ?

Our incomes come from trainings, workshops, and other services we provide for public sector and businesses. Being part of the incubator is free, so entrepreneurs don't pay anything.

We have diverse financing sources. The biggest and most regular donation comes from the [Polish-American Freedom Foundation](#). We receive subsidies from Ministry of Development, Ministry of Culture and the City of Warsaw. We also cooperate with [European Cultural Foundation](#) from Amsterdam. So, it's a mix between local, national and international partners.

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THE CHALLENGES

WAS IT EASY TO MOBILIZE PEOPLE AND PARTNERS AT THE BEGINNING ?

Yes because our initiative was unique ! Poland was very different 15 years ago. When we met local communities, we were an attraction and people really cared about our methods and what we proposed to support them.

WHAT WERE YOUR MAIN CHALLENGES AND HOW DID YOU FACE THEM ?

We realized that our method wasn't the best way to offer something stable to local actors. It was not enough. We didn't want to travel so much and we couldn't be everywhere. At the same time, we saw many people in Poland willing to do something for their communities but without knowing how to start and make the first step. So we changed our process : we settled here in Warsaw and we hired trainers and mentors. We call them "flying cultural animators" because they visit communities all over Poland. They are sociologists, psychologists, designers, filmmakers, photographers, etc. They make local diagnoses, see what's going on and why it doesn't work. They design special workshops and trainings to help entrepreneurs solve their problems.

Second crisis was a scale issue. We received an important grant from an EU fund, which also means big expectations. We needed to set up as an institution. So the question was : "Do we want to become bigger or do we continue to be small and more flexible ?". The NGO became a little bigger and now we have long-term projects. We have more stability, goals and plans not only for the next 6 months. We can look further.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES YOU NEED TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT IN THE FUTURE ?

The scale issue is still present and we have to pay close attention about it. But most important is our current political and social crisis here in Poland. Context isn't comfortable for NGOs, public fundings are decreasing and political control on public institutions is getting harder and harder. This is just the beginning and we don't know what's going to happen next...

APPROACH OF LIFE

« **People in general, meeting people and finding news ideas : this is something which motivates me ! »**

WHAT WAS THE "TRIGGERING FACTOR" FOR YOU TO ACT ?

I studied sociology, so all social issues speak to me. I didn't want to make only theory but concrete things. I was very active at school, so it was quite natural for me to do something good for others. We didn't expect to make our NGO a real job. We just hit the road trying to make our idea come true !

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU IN LIFE ?

People in general, meeting people and finding news ideas. And also when I see the results of my work. This is something which motivates me !

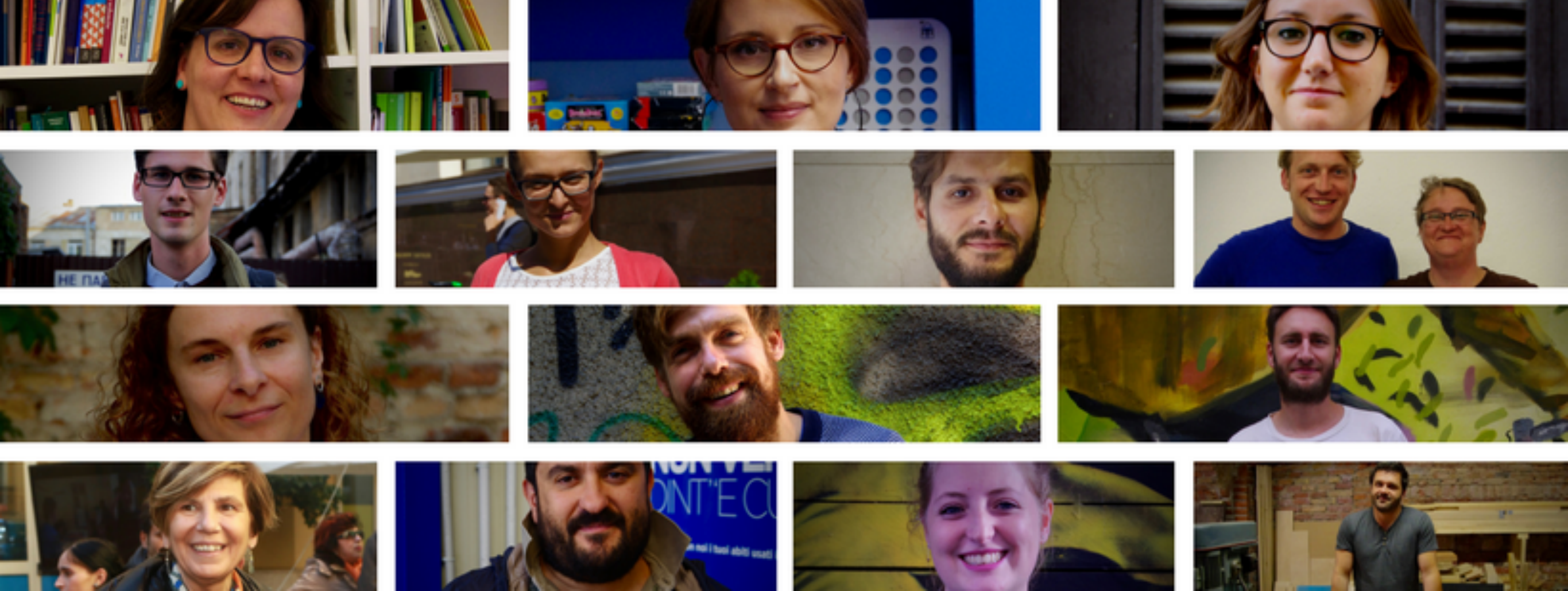
CAN YOU GIVE ME ONE WORD/ADJECTIVE/FEELING TO SUM UP YOUR ENGAGEMENT ?

I would say "authenticity". I think it's very important to be authentic when you meet so many projects dealing with diverse issues. Ready-made methods fail, you need to design personally each support without tricks. This is sometimes difficult, but it's fascinating !

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credit : « E » association of Creative Initiatives



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