

Tools

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Tools for resilience

Experiences in building
resilience of environmental
initiatives

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**...why this
toolkit?**

**Building layers
of resilience**



In pursuit of meaningful change, activism often demands immense energy, dedication, and emotional resilience. The journey can be both inspiring and challenging, filled with triumphs and setbacks. **This toolkit is designed to empower activists and groups with strategies and resources to sustain their well-being, enhance their effectiveness, and build stronger, more inclusive movements.** It brings together Zelena Akcija's experience of 35 years in the environmental movement, paired with what we've learned during the 'Resilient activism in times of uncertainty' project.

At its core, resilient activism is about more than enduring the pressures of advocacy and climate and environmental urgency – it's about thriving amidst them. **It requires personal care, supportive communities, adaptable strategies, and a commitment to justice and inclusion.** With these

principles in mind, this toolkit addresses what we believe are some of the key areas for long-term sustainability of activists and groups.

Whether you're a seasoned activist or just beginning your journey, this toolkit could hopefully be a resource to guide and sustain you. By weaving together care, strategy, and justice, we aim to help create lasting impact while preserving the heart and health of the individuals and communities driving change.

From the bottom of our hearts, we thank all our dear friends, activists and theoreticians, educators and trainers who selflessly taught us frameworks, helped us understand different concepts and design and test these practices all these years. On this occasion, we especially thank our comrades from Ulex and Training for Change, Friends of the Earth and Young Friends of the Earth, as well as the colleagues from the Croatian civil society and non-formal groups that were present at the 'School of resilience' training and who shared their ideas, doubts and best practices with us.

All of them are incorporated into this toolkit.

This is a list of recommendations that can or cannot function depending on the cultural and political contexts. Please use it freely but make sure you analyze your own context in order to maxi-

mize the benefits of these recommendations and to simply not lose time and energy if some things just don't work in your community. Also, **our intention is to open discussions that we found useful to building resilience**, but – in this toolbox – we're just scratching the surface. Search, experiment and cherry-pick what you think is useful and applicable. There is so much more to say, experiment and experience in this field... but this is our way of starting this discussion among ourselves and our dear colleagues and, hopefully, of offering some potentially useful ideas to others, ideas that could help us in our common quest of building a better world.



**Layer one:
Internal
organizational
resilience**

What are the group dynamics at play?

We come to the work collective or group with different levels of life and activist experience. This experience, among other things, may depend on social identity categories and related experiences we had throughout our lives. All these factors affect who among us speaks more or less, who speaks longer or shorter, whose ideas are more or less accepted, how work is distributed, etc. For example, in a patriarchal society, throughout their lives, cis men generally do not experience others interrupting them while speaking and are often used to taking advantage of opportunities to express their own opinion. Because they are used to having their opinions valued, they give themselves enough time to express their thoughts. They take

a confident stance. In contrast, the experience of women or non-binary people is often different. They get interrupted, they are judged by categories unrelated to the topic they are talking about (e.g their appearance or age...) and they are sometimes even silenced during the conversation. Due to such life experience, they speak up less often and are more uncertain, even when they are well versed in the subject. Gender dynamics are just one of many examples of dynamics that can occur in a group.

If the group is aware of these dynamics we have an opportunity to make progress in this matter. For example, cis men who are aware of such dynamics and the space they themselves occupy have the opportunity to become allies. As allies, they will leave the floor to other genders and warn other men when they talk too long, interrupt or repeat what has already been said. In a culture where such dynamics are recognized, all genders have more self-confidence and space to express their opinions.

Understanding power

Understanding and learning how to work with power and how power works in our groups is a key skill for effective collaboration. Although it can be a

difficult topic to discuss, developing trust, courage, and the mechanisms by which a group addresses power is the foundation of healthy collaborative work.

Be willing to facilitate conversations about how power manifests in your group. Such conversations will encourage the building of trust and mutual understanding. However, it is important that you lead them with sufficient sensitivity and shared commitment. If they are hidden, group dynamics and power relations will reveal themselves when talked about. Before starting such conversations, be aware of your own tendencies around power so it doesn't steer the conversation in the direction of a hidden power struggle. Although exploring power in a group can develop trust, it is important that this is initiated at times when trust in the group and among members is already at a high level in order to achieve the desired effect.

The 'mainstream' and the 'margin'

In every group, no matter how homogeneous it may seem at first glance, in the context of group dynamics, the dynamics of the mainstream and the margin appear. Mainstream is seen from the outside as the 'main' part of the group. It repre-

sents certain qualities, behaviors and values that the group upholds and that hold it together and build its culture. Margins are qualities, behaviors and values that, as the name suggests, are on the edge and are not visible from the outside. It is important that the mainstream of the group sees the margin of the group and appreciates the comments and objections, since it is an experience from which the whole group can benefit. It is important to emphasize that the mainstream does not represent the numerical majority, but ideas, approaches and ways that have more power, that is, those that easily influence the group. For example, in activist groups focused primarily on the organization of activities, the mainstream is the part of the group that sees this type of action as the most valuable. This part believes that actions are worth investing the most effort and energy in. In such a group, the margin would maybe like to direct more energy and time into in-depth conversations and discussions about topics such as values or the process. Maybe this part would like more time between organizing different activities. From this example, we see that without the mainstream, the group would not exist, because actions would not take place, and without opening space for discussions, which the margin considers important, the group could be completely exhausted after a while and lose its meaning, or in another words, lose the main reasons for action.

How 'leaderful' are we?

The concept of 'leaderful organizing' is quite vast. We recently had the chance to explore it together with our partners **Ulex – Collectiu Eco-Actiu, European Community Organising Network (ECON) and LABO VZW.**

A term we've been introduced to relatively recently, 'leaderfulness' differs from more traditional ways of looking at leadership and why we believe it matters. It is also sometimes called 'transformative leadership' and 'leaderful organizing'. Transformative leadership involves investing in people's growth and capacities, as well as developing our movement's ability to be relational, rooted in reality, collective, supportive, nurturing, adaptive and visionary. Leaderful organizing is an intentional approach to invest in the development of transformational leaders whose role is to serve, deepen and expand groups, and more widely - social movements. But deciding that you want to become a 'leaderful organization' or group is actually the easy part! It takes a lot of learning, unlearning and making mistakes, while the group slowly grows into leaderful organizing.

In collaboration with our aforementioned partners during the project called 'ISELE – Innovating Social Entrepreneurial Leadership Education', we devel-

oped ten competency areas that help us understand what it takes to cultivate leadership, both on an individual level and within the structures, culture, and practices of an organization. These competencies represent a range of skills that together enable leaderful organizing. Think of these skills as pieces of a puzzle: some you may already have in place, while others might be harder to identify. This highlights the importance of prioritizing: on which areas of competence does a specific collective wish to focus? Which areas are already sufficiently covered? And which skills could be beneficial for a group to develop in the next phase of its growth?

Once the group has established a shared understanding of the value of leaderful organizing, it's important to dedicate time to identify the competency areas participants want to explore further. To address this, a tool we created comes in handy as it helps us assess both our individual capabilities and our groups strengths across all ten competency areas. On the following page, we present one version of this tool. A list of questions that participants can answer, which helps us see where our strengths and growth areas lie, making it easy to identify where further exploration could be most beneficial.

Assessment Tool

Please read the following questions and rate yourself and your organization / movement for each of the Leaderful Organizing skill areas on a scale from (a to c)

COMPETENCY AREA	Individual self-assessment	A B C	Organizational assessment	A B C
LEADERSHIP	How much do you embrace leadership		To what extent does your organization/ movement have leadership development structures?	
VALUES	To what extent do your actions challenge systemic oppression?		To what extent does your organization/movement puts the agency of most affected from systemic injustice at the center?	
RESPONSIVE ACTION	To what extent do you feel comfortable in moments of uncertainty?		How much is your organization/movement able to respond to moments of crisis?	
RESILIENCE AND REGENERATION	How well do you take care of your levels of energy and wellbeing?		To what extent does your organization prevent and address burnout culture?	
ORGANIZING	How about are you to build relationships and trust?		Do you have structures and strategies in place to build people power?	
STRATEGY	How able are you to develop effective and impactful plans?		To what extent had your organization/movement has a long-term vision and plan developed?	
LEARNING	To what extent do you take breaks to reflect and learn on what you are doing?		To what extent does your organization facilitate collective learning?	
POWER	How self-aware are you of your own power, rank and privilege?		How well is power distributed in your organization / movement?	
TRANSFORMATIVE COLLABORATION	To what extent is your organization/movement able to collaborate internally?		To what extent is your organization/movement able to collaborate externally?	
COMMUNICATION	Are you able to listen deeply and hold of judgement?		Does your group/organization have structures for a transparent communication flow?	

SOURCE LEADERFUL ORGANIZING: A CURRICULUM GUIDE. DEVELOPING KEY COMPETENCIES FOR LEADERFUL MOVEMENTS.

The three angles of group work

In every collective there are people who in certain circumstances – and sometimes naturally – tend to focus on one of these three aspects of group work.

1. TASK

People who coordinate, pay attention to content and deadlines, do their best to make the result top-notch, feel guilty or responsible if they consider the task unfulfilled.

2. PROCESS

People who make sure that the process takes place according to the values of the group – inclusive and transparent. They pay attention to the division of responsibilities, delegation and respect for horizontal or vertical structures. They are sensitive to violations of these structures.

3. RELATIONSHIPS

People who pay attention to relationships in the group, show respect and appreciation of others and their efforts and time. They often conduct informal mediation among group members, bring a spirit of fun and relaxation, and foster a sense of belonging to the group.

It has shown that in order for our collective work to be successful, it is necessary to be aware of the importance of the different tendencies that we have in the group and to ensure a balance between all three angles.

Ideally, most people would know that all three types of focus are very important for the long-term survival of the collective. Some, with experience in group work, will be able to keep in mind and actively nurture all three angles during a planning process, while some will be extremely focused only on the execution of the action (task) or only on the friendly tone of the meeting (relationships). That's fine too, as long as there is an understanding that all three aspects are important.

A little help from internal documents

Process-wise, having clearly agreed internal processes represented in different types of documents really helps to prevent and transform many areas that are vulnerable as we work together as a group. Here are just some of them we've managed to implement and which we find incredibly useful.

- **ANTI-HARASSMENT**

An anti-harassment policy ensures a safe and

respectful environment by setting clear behavior standards and addressing misconduct effectively. It demonstrates the organization's commitment to equity, prevents harm, and should foster trust and collaboration among its members.

- **NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION**

Nonviolent communication (NVC) guidelines provide a framework for nurturing empathy, respect, and understanding in interactions. By focusing on clear expression and active listening, they help prevent and transform conflicts while strengthening relationships. These guidelines promote a culture of collaboration and inclusivity, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

- **CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**

Conflict transformation rules provide a structured approach to addressing and reshaping conflicts in a constructive way. They focus on understanding underlying issues, opening up dialogue, and seeking solutions that promote growth and collaboration. These guidelines emphasize respect, active listening, and shared responsibility, helping to turn conflicts into opportunities for positive change.

- **INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY**

Inclusion and diversity guidelines outline an organization's commitment to embracing and valuing differences, ensuring that everyone feels

respected and supported. They are guidelines for fostering equity, eliminating biases, and creating opportunities for underrepresented groups. This document promotes a culture of belonging, where diverse perspectives drive innovation, collaboration, and growth, reflecting the group's dedication to fairness and inclusivity in all its practices.

Good meetings don't just happen

The recipe for an effective and inclusive meeting is good facilitation. Facilitation includes a series of roles and tasks that can be taken on by one or more people. The goal of facilitation is to ensure a productive meeting, that people are focused and involved in the processes, and that decisions are mutually agreed upon. Good facilitators don't make decisions for the group. They can express their personal opinion, but in the role of facilitator they remain neutral, they do not take sides. They have the trust of everyone in the meeting because they treat everyone as equal. Finally, they objectively summarize all the ideas from the discussion into several options so that the group can collectively choose the option that seems best and most likely to be implemented.

This whole prior section might be a 'goes without saying' moment, as within the movement we are aware that meetings need to be properly facilitated. However, we believed it would be useful to, for a moment, repeat the basic roles of facilitation. Maybe your group is already at a high level, is aware of the tips and practices them daily. But maybe you'll find some interesting new approaches to facilitation, so in any case, it cannot hurt!

Facilitator tips!

1. present to everyone what the meeting will look like, what rules you use during the meeting and what is on the agenda (e.g. do you use hand signals etc.)
2. ask for help if needed! Find a person for the role of co-facilitator who will keep the minutes, track the time or follow the order of speaking
3. allow emotions to be present in the process; open the meeting with the question: «How are we feeling?» Or: «How was your day today?» and have everyone answer very briefly. This allows people to enter the meeting with the emotions that are present, which could help the process.
4. keep the meeting focused on one item at a time and the group focused on the agenda and de-

cision-making process. Small digressions are inevitable, but make sure that people stay on topic and feel free to gently warn them if they have gone completely off topic – the facilitator is expected to moderate the discussion.

5. help everyone participate; encourage quiet people to share their opinions and limit those who talk a lot and keep coming up
6. counter aggressive or discriminatory behavior
7. make sure everyone understands and follows the discussion, clarify points, arguments or proposals if necessary
8. help the group deal with conflict, approach the problem constructively and propose changes
9. listen to fundamental problems, concerns or emotions; address them, encourage people to express them so they can be dealt with
10. summarize different opinions and make suggestions to conclude topics, let the group decide which proposal is the best
11. always check whether the group agrees with a conclusion and help in forming clear group decisions. Ensure that the names of persons taking charge of decisions and tasks are written

in the minutes and that the tasks are equally distributed among members.

12. hold the meeting at the agreed time, ideally without delay and within the agreed end time.

Need a co-facilitator?

Sometimes, depending on the size of the group and the gravity of the content, one person is not enough to hold the facilitation. The role of co-facilitator can be taken by one or more people

- welcome people, inform them about practical matters; for online meetings, resolve technical difficulties and the like
- support each other and help the facilitator with what's needed
- follow the order of speaking
- track the time and adhere to the agreed time frame for different agenda items, agree on an extension if necessary
- pay attention to the atmosphere of the meeting and the energy level and intervene if necessary (introduce break time!)

- keep detailed minutes, record group decisions and who took which role or task
- call attention to incomplete decisions, e.g. clarify 'who will contact that person and when'



**Layer two:
Financial
resilience
– example
of Croatia**

Mapping alternative models and strategies for financing organizations and public advocacy campaigns

Financing our work has shown to be one of the biggest challenges we face, especially in the climate of shrinking civic space, as we've been experiencing in Europe and beyond. These are some of the ways we tried to approach diversifying our financial resilience. Some of these might work for your context, some might not, it really depends, but we hope it helps!

- 1. Crowdfunding campaigns:** We can launch online campaigns through platforms like Kickstarter or Indiegogo to raise funds for specific projects or initiatives.

- 2. Individual donors (donations from people):** We can actively seek donations from individuals who support our mission and goals. This can be achieved through street fundraising, through a standing order or online donation, a newsletter or organizing fundraising events.
- 3. Sponsorships and partnerships with the private sector:** we could establish partnerships with companies or other organizations that share our values and goals. Due to the specificity of their public activities and the criteria that individual organizations have, a rather narrow scope of cooperation with the private sector could be possible... or you could end up participating in *greenwashing*, so beware and be careful when taking this approach.
- 4. Offering our services for fees:** We can develop products or services that can be sold to generate income. For example, selling t-shirts, bags or educational materials that promote our messages and values. This can be a useful direction to diversify funding, but given the extent of the needs, sometimes this can represent a minimal contribution to the annual budget.
- 5. Membership fees:** we could establish a membership program where individuals pay membership fees in exchange for various benefits such as access to exclusive events or resources.

Given the small number of members with the right to vote (in our case...), it is necessary to develop other types of member support, such as supporters or «friends» of the organization not necessarily connected to assembly membership.

6. Donor grants or project financing: Searching and applying for grants from national or international organizations, foundations or governments grant opportunities that support projects in the field of environmental protection. Classic...

These models are just some of the ways in which environmental organizations can diversify their funding sources and ensure the stability and sustainability of their activities. In theory each of them works, but turning it into reality is a different story. Below we will present an example from Croatia and the different levels of barriers to this approach, which may or may not exist in other countries.

Analysis of obstacles to greater financing civil society by supporters

In the last twenty years, numerous civil society organizations have tried in various ways to encourage

people to support their work, projects and campaigns. This experience should be taken into account in order to once again analyze the specificity of the context in the Republic of Croatia. The lack of a culture of donation and mistrust are still the dominant factors affecting the number and amount of this much-needed support. Below are some other elements of the context in which we work.

- 1. Lack of awareness:** Many people may not be aware of the role and importance of civil society in the wider society and therefore are not inclined to donate or support its activities. The culture of donation is not sufficiently developed except in critical situations where humanitarian actions are needed.
- 2. Economic Insecurity:** People facing economic hardship may not have the means to donate to or support civil society, even if they are sympathetic to its goals.
- 3. Lack of trust:** Lack of trust in the transparency and efficiency of civil organizations can deter people from donating. Fear of misuse of funds or irresponsible management can reduce their willingness to provide financial support.
- 4. Lack of access to information:** People may not have enough information about civil society organizations working in their area or about

specific projects they support. Lack of transparency can make it difficult to make an informed decision about donating.

5. Regulatory framework: Complexity and ambiguities in the legal and regulatory framework for financing civil society can make it difficult for people to donate. The lack of clear guidelines and incentives for donors can reduce their willingness to provide financial support.

6. Lack of motivation: People may not have enough motivation or sense of connection with the goals and activities of civil organizations, which may reduce their willingness to donate.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overcoming these obstacles requires joint efforts from civil society, government and other stakeholders to improve awareness, transparency and trust in the civil society sector and movements and encourage greater support from people. This includes educating the public, improving the regulatory framework, promoting transparency and accountability of civil society organizations, and ensuring accessible and efficient channels for donations and support.

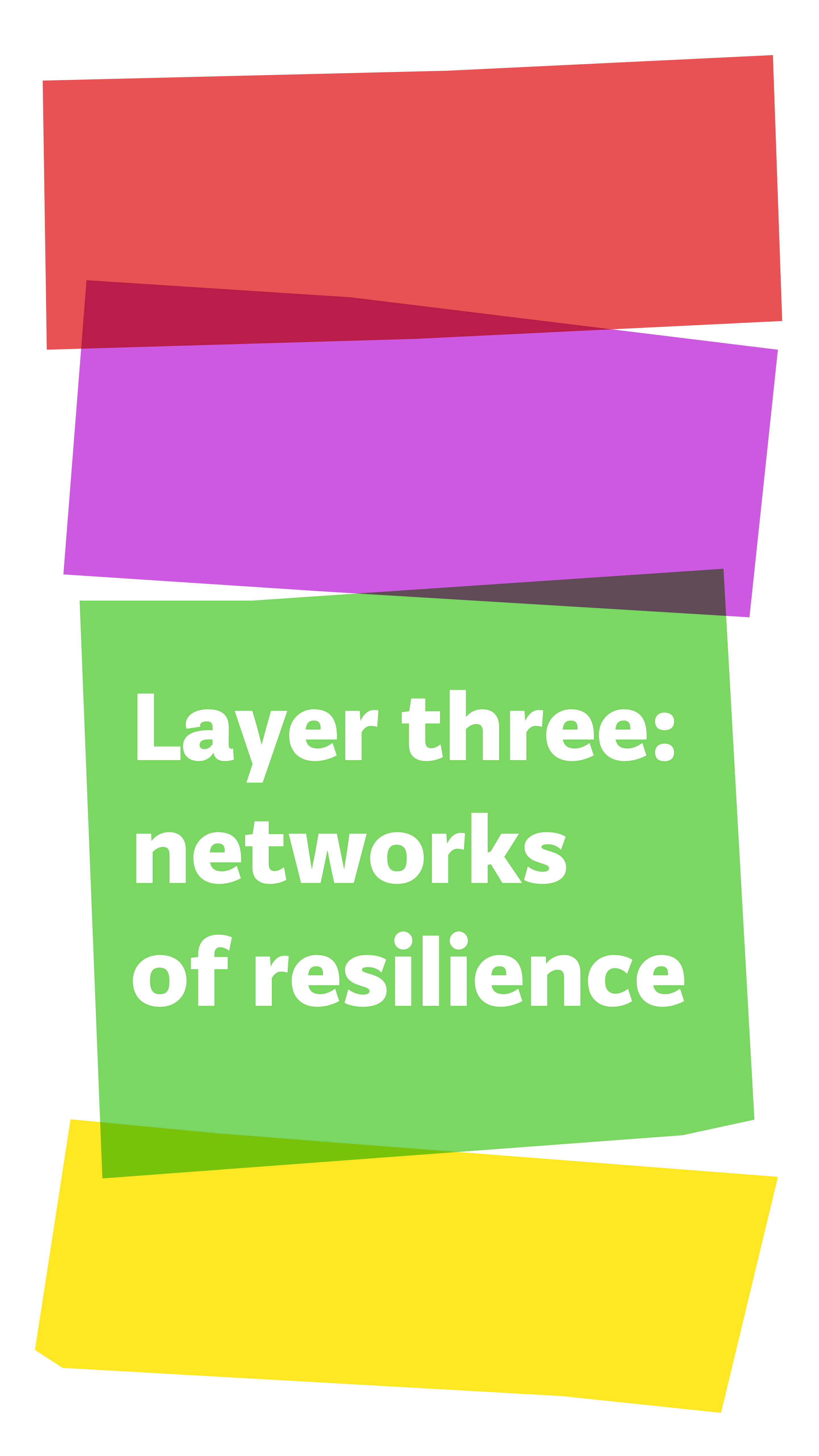
Developing online financing as the main goal for achieving resilience requires careful planning and implementation of strategies, and it is necessary to further elaborate certain elements in order to ensure sustainability and to make the percentage of the share in the organization's total budget sufficiently relevant.

First steps could involve...

- 1. Identify of objectives:** Define specific projects or initiatives for which you want to raise funds. Clearly state how these funds will be used and what their environmental impact will be.
- 2. Choose the right funding platform:** Choose the crowdfunding platform that is most suitable for our organization and goals. Choose between popular platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, GoFundMe or local platforms that support projects in Croatia. A variant that requires a lot more effort and finances is the integration of the donation system into our own pages and communication channels.
- 3. Prepare an attractive campaign:** Create a story that will encourage people to support your campaign. Highlight your mission, goals and past successes. Include visuals like photos and

videos to further engage potential donors.

- 4. Set realistic goals and rewards:** Set a target amount we want to raise, but be realistic. Consider different levels of donations and provide rewards or perks for donors, such as personalized 'thank you' notes, exclusive content or products related to our organization.
- 5. Campaign Promotion:** Use all available channels to promote our campaign. This includes social media, email, website, but also personal contacts and a support network. Posting regular updates on the progress of the campaign would keep donors interested.
- 6. Transparency towards donors:** Be transparent about the use of the collected funds. We regularly inform donors about how their money is being used and what progress has been made on the project.
- 7. Thank the donors:** Don't forget to thank all donors, regardless of the size of their donation. We show them how much we value their support and engagement in our environmental initiatives. Continuously maintaining the connection with donors and people and providing transparency is essential.



**Layer three:
networks
of resilience**

Whether we work with volunteers or other people, it's important to understand the resilience of this work and relationships as well as which factors contribute to it. These are some of our thoughts on what worked in our case!

Starting an activist / volunteer group

What attracts people to join and stay in a group is its basic structure, values, ways of working and interpersonal relationships that are nurtured within it. A lot of group processes will later depend on the structure that is set up at the beginning.

Zelena Akcija's Activist Group has continuously existed for more than 25 years. The structure of the

group varied over the years. Here are some tips that might be useful for the ones wanting to start or maintain an active volunteer group within their organization.

Independence and autonomy?

While it is certainly crucial that the volunteer group harmonizes its vision, mission, and values with the organization, the ways of working and decision-making processes can differ to ensure that the activist group maintains a level of autonomy. This might not work for everyone, especially NGOs with more vertical structures. In Zelena Akcija, we try to balance the relationship between ‘the office’ – employees and the ‘volunteers’ – activists. We strive to collectively make decisions on how our activities and campaigns will look like, what message we will highlight and which next steps we will take.

We try to ensure a balance between what the office believes is important (example: doing an action in front of the ministry on a certain topic) with what the volunteers believe is important (to do an ad hoc action to support a human rights group).

Another way we try to ensure this is to have a representative of the Activist Group present in higher

decision-making processes of the organization. The coordinator of the Activist Group has been, for more than a decade, a member of the Board of ZA. The activists have freedom to propose their own topics and are invited to attend board meetings and other important processes that define the direction of the organization.

Our own strategy, within the wider strategy

Again, regardless of the level of independence and autonomy of the group, it is important that the group follows the overall strategic plan of the organization. Inviting volunteers to join strategic and operational planning processes has shown great results, as they feel more ownership over the organizations' wider goals and strategies. We try to organize the planning when as many people from the group can be present as possible. Clear and mutually agreed short-term and long-term work strategies, which are respected, will contribute to the fact that the volunteers feel that this is truly a space where they can express themselves and act. Apart from the strategic and operational plan of the organization, it is also encouraged that the volunteer group come up with their own plan for the year. They might put emphasis on certain processes they want to develop or implement, knowl-

edge they want to obtain or formats they want to try out. It is important to offer volunteers support in their plans, be it logistical, advice, training or other.

Meeting locations and times

Depending on the resources you have, finding locations and times that work for people can be an easier or a more difficult task. Our recommendation is that the location and dates are fixed, that is, that they change as little as possible. It is preferable that activists adjust their free time to the dates, and not the dates to their free time. As for the location, it must be as accessible as possible, it must not depend on weather factors (day, night, rain, snow, sun) and it must be possible to reach by public transport. Make sure that it is accessible to people with disabilities. If you don't have a space of your own, it's possible to use some public space such as community centers, autonomous squats or spaces owned by cities and municipalities.

Rotating coordination?

Coordination of meetings is very important. In 25 years of ZA's Activist Group, we've been trying out different models: from several volunteers coordi-

nating at one time, to one volunteer / coordinator. For more than a decade, one coordinator has been a paid staff member. For us, this option works best, but we need to keep in mind not to overburden this person with other project-related tasks, which tends to happen. The development of the group would ideally be the main focus of the coordinator. Also, we change the person in that position every 4 – 6 years and try to ensure gender balance between different coordinators. The process of selecting the coordinator is shared between the office and the volunteer group – both have to approve of the person in a transparent process that both parties agree to.

Nurturing the collective

Nurturing an activist / volunteer collective is extremely important for maintaining the group and keeping people interested, so that they have the opportunity to grow and develop. Although the people who are part of the group are committed to the same goal and (mostly) share the same values, we all come with different levels of knowledge and experience that affect the dynamics of relationships and thus the collective work. Below are some of the aspects we find important, that can help ensure that all members have an equal opportunity to contribute and that each member feels comfortable within the group.

How important is the ‘container’?

So-called ‘container building’ refers to getting to know each other, building trust and generally strengthening relationships between group members. Building trust is especially important in the first phase of the group, when new members join or when you organize multi-day events in which new people participate. Although it is possible for these crucial bonds to happen organically, good facilitation of this process is essential, as it lays a good foundation for future group work. In practice, we tend to use different tools and icebreakers, to reduce social pressure and provide a space where everyone has the opportunity to express themselves when getting to know each other. Also, in order for newly arrived members to feel as comfortable as possible and to have direct support in finding their way within the organizational structure, it is useful to form so-called ‘buddy systems’. In practice, this means that each person within the group is connected to another person who is then their ‘official companion’. It is preferable to have a person with more experience and a person with less experience in the organization as buddies. The task of a two-person team is to support each other outside of meetings and within different work processes and tasks.

Effective online communication

It is important for the group to collectively decide on the channels through which they will talk, discuss, make decisions and plan. It does not have to be just one channel, but it should be clear for what purposes each channel is used. For example, you can have an e-mailing list for discussions and ideas and different messaging applications for quick reminders. However, we've seen a lot of frustration coming up if people spam, vent or share unrelated content to channels that should have a clear goal. It's OK to remind people periodically how to preferably use which channel. It is also important that the communication channel you choose as a group is available to everyone. If you are planning a meeting or an event where you want to include as many people as possible at different stages, don't be embarrassed to send reminders.

Evaluation of actions and work

When the group organizes different types of activities, it is important that they have a certain effect on society or achieve something. In addition to the effect on society, activities can also have an

effect on the group, so it is good to observe these two types of effects together in order to learn as much as possible from our actions and activities. For example, if the group puts a lot of effort, energy and resources into one action, and the action does not reach its goal or achieve change (e.g. end up in a lot of media), you may decide not to do such actions again. You may think in detail about where you think it got stuck and what to keep in mind next time. Maybe the action did not achieve the desired social effect, but through it the group strengthened itself and gained experience, which means that it made sense for the group. It is very important that we do not go from activity to activity without any reference to previous experience, because it is likely that mistakes will get repeated. A good practice is to organize a separate meeting, analyze the steps for the preparation and execution of the activity, roles, relationships in the group and personal observations and feelings, as well as success in achieving goals and conveying messages. A very basic outline of the evaluation can be: 1) what we should keep (put on the wall), 2) what was good, but for another occasion (put on the shelf), 3) what was bad and we don't want to repeat (throw in the trash). It is important to include all persons and accept all opinions, not to blame anyone for mistakes or omissions, but to collectively support each other and find solutions so that you do not repeat them next time. It is important to point out what was positive, praise

successes, and then accept criticism and suggestions for improvement.

Team building

In addition to the processes of planning and doing activities together, in order to get even closer as a group and connect on different levels, we recommend organizing a team-building event from time to time. Start planning far enough in advance and find a date that works best for most people. A team building can last a few hours, one day or several days, depending on the available resources and capacities. These can be different group activities that you can organize with more or less structure, depending on what you want to achieve. If you just want to rest a little after a tiring action or campaign, you can organize a regenerative trip to nature such as hiking, going to the forest, going to the beach, picking mushrooms or cooking together. If, on the other hand, you want it to be an opportunity for education and connecting new people from the group, you can design a program with activities specifically intended for team building.

Celebration of effort and success

Activities are important to evaluate, and it is equally important to celebrate them well! In this way, we acknowledge the effort and energy invested, while also having a good time and strengthening bonds. Therefore, when organizing the activity, keep in mind that by the end of it, the group should not disperse immediately, but should try to return to the base for a short toast. Preparing tea or coffee with snacks, collectively watching pictures or sharing impressions and anecdotes does not require a lot of preparation, while it really makes a difference.

Leading on values

Values and principles are an essential part of a group's culture and a basis on which the group will continue to develop. Agreeing on values is necessary because based on this, we decide on our future direction, on how we frame our narratives, with whom we cooperate or form alliances, etc.

The values should be reflected in everything the group does. Revisiting values is OK, but generally the values should be stable even after many new people have joined or many years have passed

since the group was founded. Here are some values we found useful for our group. **They are also represented in the Young Friends of the Earth manifesto and are also based on the concept of ‘safer / courageous spaces’, practiced at Ulex training centers.**

CHALLENGING OUR PRIVILEGES — We do not separate the personal and the political. Systemic oppression is also expressed at the individual level, as well as being expressed at the level of our movement, and dismantling these structures implies adopting reflective perspectives on our privileges, lived oppressions and biases.

INCLUSIVENESS — which implies accessibility and openness. We must all learn and unlearn structural oppression. We aim to create a non-judgmental environment that supports people to learn and to grow – both within our own groups and networks, and beyond.

RESPECT — We respect speaking time and always aim to keep a reflexive perspective on the space we occupy, or do not occupy, in meetings, including stepping up or stepping back. We also aim to reflect on who takes up tasks and roles, and how this often reveals oppressive dynamics. We also respect each other based on our use of language and use tools and exercises that support us to challenge ourselves and others in impactful and meaningful ways.

INFORMING OURSELVES AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR ACTIONS — Everyone is responsible for their behavior, and all oppressive behavior – racist, sexist, ableist, classist, ageist, transphobic, homophobic, xenophobic. This behavior will be challenged.

PRACTICING SOLIDARITY — We aim to practice meaningful allyship with other movements beyond the environmental movement.

ACKNOWLEDGING AND EMBRACING DIFFERENCE — We understand that we don't all experience the same things in the same way – and this spectrum of differences is what strengthens our network. Thus, we are striving to build an intersectional movement.

EMBEDDING THESE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES — across all our events and activities and through our analysis in our campaigns and actions.

Cultures of decision-making

Again, depending on the level of autonomy the group has, there are several things to take into account. Decision-making is a very important work process. Decisions must be made constantly and are of different types – from everyday ones to extremely important ones for the future and progress of the group. Decision-making processes al-

ways exist, but many groups do not discuss them in a structured way at all, rather the processes are implied or taken for granted. This is not ideal because a part of the group may be dissatisfied with the way in which decisions are made, which may cause conflicts and the departure of part of the membership in the long run. It may happen that the group realizes only afterwards that someone was left out of decision-making, or that, although a decision exists, none of the members want to take responsibility for it. In order to properly understand decision-making processes, it is necessary to know which forms exist and how to use them optimally in different situations.

Within the Activist Group, we tend to use different decision making processes, depending on the situation, context, need and time we have available.

The coordinator / campaigner makes a decision, without discussion One person decides, without the need to consult with the group. For example, the coordinator of the ongoing action has an overview of the situation and makes a decision on the spot, and the group trusts that this is the best decision at the time.

An expert member of the group makes a decision The decision is made by a person who is an expert in a certain area, without the need to consult with the group. For example,

a web designer decides on web design issues. **Average opinion of members** When we have several options, the most popular opinion is taken as the decision, possibly without discussion. For example, among 4 slogans for a banner, members vote for the best one, and the one with the most votes wins. It works similarly with polls, like doodle.

The coordinator / campaigner decides, after a discussion One person makes a decision after discussing and consulting with the whole group. For example, the campaigner decides, after consulting with the activists, the type of action we will do as a next step in the campaign.

Minority decision A working group composed of two or more people, but less than 50% of the whole group, which has a mandate to decide, decides on that scope of work. For example, the 'design group' of the Environmental Film Festival decides on the main visual for the festival.

Majority decision The entire membership (or quorum) votes for the option, either with or without discussion. A classic form of democracy, the option with the most votes wins.

Consensus No one in the group opposes the decision, although there may be different levels of agreement. But, in principle, everyone is in favor!

Sociocracy After a round of discussion and a round of remarks and objections, everyone from the group is individually asked to give consent on a decision that is *good enough for now and safe enough to try*. Therefore, each decision has an expiration date after which the group reevaluates it. Everyone's opinion is respected, but personal preferences cannot stop group processes.

Each of the decision-making methods requires a different amount of time and results in different forms of participation of members and ultimately a different type of responsibility of the membership. While in the case of consensus the whole group is involved and responsible for implementing the decision, the time it takes to agree on perspectives can be long. If we want to decide by consensus, and there is a deadline for action, it is possible that we might miss the deadline due to the duration of the process. On the other hand, although the time required for a decision would be much shorter, if only one person makes a decision for the whole group, the rest of the group may not agree with it. For example, a technical type of change in a press release may not require the attention of the entire group. In contrast, the vision and strategy for the future, as well as the message we send as a group through activities, are important decisions that would benefit from the consensus of all members. Many day-to-day decisions that require quick reaction do not necessarily need the attention of the entire group.

Moreover, if we constantly make decisions through long-term discussions people can get exhausted and the group would be too busy deciding to move forward and do an actual activity. What is important is that there is trust that the ones making the decisions are acting in the best interest of the group. All ways of making decisions are legitimate, it all depends on the context, the structure of the group and the trust among the membership.

More complex projects that are fully planned, discussed and executed by the volunteer group are a really good playfield for this combined decision-making. For example, the biggest autonomous project of the year for the Activist Group – the Environmental Film Festival, which has been running for 12 years, uses almost all of the decision making processes listed above.

Practicing what we preach – working with people

While working with people and participants of our trainings and educational events, a framework which we found very useful was the concept of 'braver spaces' or 'courageous spaces', **which we learned about in Ulex, but which also has other roots in Crossroads anti-racist training, among others.**

In our work with people, a training or workshop is not just about the content of sessions, it is also about building a temporary community where our values are put into practice. We usually propose and introduce this framework in the introductory session and remind ourselves and the participants of these principles often.

The basic principles of 'braver' or 'courageous' spaces are:

NO ATTACKS, meaning we will not intentionally cause harm to each other.

We will stand in **SOLIDARITY** with each other. We will recognize each other's humanity and support each other in our struggles and the work that we do.

We will **EMBRACE COMPLEXITY**. We will try to understand that things are not either/or. Patriarchy, capitalism and other systems of oppression want us to think that things are binary. We are taught that things are good or bad, useful or not useful, desirable or undesirable. We all come from different places, so we try to undo that conditioning and think about all the existing gray zones, how everything is complex and made up of different elements. This is a skill that will support us in showing solidarity with each other and building a deeper understanding of where each of us comes from.

We **LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND**. The way some of us, or most of us, are taught to listen is not really to understand. When we are in conversation with somebody we're often thinking about a response, what we want to say. So, we try to develop an ability to listen so that we can understand where the person is coming from and we ask follow-up questions rather than make assumptions. This is another crucial skill that will help us build solidarity with each other.


CONTROVERSY WITH RESPECT. 'Braver' spaces got this name because they allow us to voice different opinions and ideas and to express them. Conflicting opinions are accepted as long as we respect each other. We hold that complexity, embrace it and invite different points of view without losing respect for each other.

We **OWN INTENTIONS AND IMPACTS**. We might say things or have opinions that can be harmful, that can cause distress and affect other people's well-being. So when that happens (it probably will), we acknowledge and discuss those situations rather than just hide behind good intentions. We try to acknowledge that the harm was done, and try to find what can be done to restore a sense of respect and solidarity.

We **CHALLENGE BY CHOICE**. We have an option to

step in and out of exercises and conversations that are happening in the space. Non-participation is valid and sometimes an essential part of self-care and it is completely legitimate.

In our experience, introducing these principles to new groups, participants, volunteers or activists and reminding ourselves of the principles has long-term positive effects on the culture of the group.



**Layer four:
Individual
resilience
or avoiding
burnout**

Burnout can happen when we invest a lot of effort, energy, passion and time in activist work, without taking care of our personal boundaries or being aware of our needs. As with any other intensive work, when you get into activism and get excited about the group or the sense of meaning that the work brings, it may happen that in the initial phase of enthusiasm you give 110% of yourself to the work, topic or group. Over time, fatigue can set in and the enthusiasm and drive get replaced by exhaustion, frustration and dissatisfaction. If you address this situation on time, along with setting certain boundaries and redistributing or changing the way you work, you will be able to continue making a meaningful and positive contribution to the group over time. If you do not address the situation on time and dissatisfaction accumulates, it is possible that you will not continue the work and the group will lose an important person.

Both my group and I are responsible

Awareness of the possibility of burnout must exist both at the personal level and at the level of the entire group. On the one hand, part of each individuals' personal responsibility is to recognize the first symptoms of burnout, to be aware of their own needs and to communicate them to their loved ones and the group. Only then can they clearly set boundaries and reduce or change the scope of work and the group's expectations of them. It should be done in a timely manner, before the person becomes tired, irritated and overwhelmed. On the other hand, the group has to act in order to prevent members from burning out. The group can build mechanisms into its structure and processes that continuously address the possibility of burnout. In this way, members will always have the possibility (even if they do not initiate it themselves) to comment and evaluate how they feel about group processes and their involvement, whether they are overloaded etc. The ways in which this can be incorporated into a structure that could also correspond to a 'culture of care' will be explained in the following points.

Emotional first point

When creating a meeting agenda, you will often have the urge to immediately jump into theoretical or strategic discussions, planning and organizing. Our advice is that regardless of the context, the first item on the agenda should include some kind of short intimate address to the whole group. So the first question, to which everyone present at the meeting answers, can be simple: «How do we feel today? Did something interesting/stressful happen to you? How do we feel about the process/action/campaign we are currently planning?» This way, each member of the group will have the opportunity to make themselves and others aware of the emotions with which they enter this process. Someone will feel happy, energetic and interested, and someone may feel anxiety due to the amount of work, other obligations, family and health problems or similar. In this way, you continuously become aware of and monitor how others feel and what they are experiencing, and it will make it easier for you to recognize the first signs of fatigue, dissatisfaction and anxiety in yourself and your colleagues.

Creating space to share emotions

Hold an optional meeting whose sole purpose is to discuss some aspect of burnout. Determine the topic according to the needs of the group, according to what you hear during the emotional first points. It can also be, for example, an honest conversation about the phenomenon of climate anxiety, a disorder that can increasingly be observed among young people, but also because of the uncertainty of the future. It could be a space where members, without the necessity of any conclusion, can just share their experiences of dealing with this problem. By actively listening to others and recognizing shared experiences, we can create a sense of understanding, solidarity and trust in the group and its members.

Support group and listeners

Designate structures within the group that members can turn to if they need a more intimate conversation or advice. In informal groups, the listeners can be chosen at joint meetings and changed on a monthly basis or every couple of months, so that the people in this function are also not overloaded with emotional work.

Regular discussions about capacities

Before major group undertakings, discuss the capacities of all members. This way the group clearly knows who can be counted on, when and in what capacity. You can do a similar check sometimes up to a year in advance using a table that members fill out, depending on how busy they will be or how occupied they may be with other things that month. Someone may have exams, someone may be traveling, and someone already knows that they do not want to be contacted at all during the entire summer, for example. That way, you'll know who you can count on when, and you won't bother those who want a time-out. If someone has accepted an obligation, but realizes in the middle of the process that they cannot continue it, it should be communicated. The group can give them the space they need and can reorganize and share the responsibility to get the job done. Likewise, someone may need to leave the group entirely for months, even years, to avoid burnout. Cultivate cultures of support, don't resent the person, support them and, if they rejoin after a long time, give them a warm welcome back.

Rotation of positions

If this is possible within the structure of your group and within previously agreed positions and job descriptions, rotating certain positions could be beneficial to prevent burnout. With the exception of rare specific skills and knowledge that only an expert can perform, most activist work can be performed by many people. Moreover, regularly rotating duties might empower group members to learn how to do new types of activities, which could develop a sense of leadership. In addition, evenly distributed leadership in informal groups is the path to long-term success. If one person is the only one organizing certain activities in a group for years, there is a greater possibility that overwhelm and fatigue will occur. The person may feel that they are no longer making progress, they might do the work halfheartedly, and others from the group will not have the opportunity to learn how to coordinate that process either.

Reducing stressors

Certain group processes that are taken for granted or are invisible in some situations can cause stress. Maybe you send important messages on a Sunday night or communicate mostly before going to bed or just after waking up. Perhaps the

regular time of the meeting does not suit the majority of the group because it prevents them in pursuing a hobby that takes place at that time. It's important to have a structured conversation about whether there are processes within your group that are contributing to collective burnout. You can become aware of this with a moderated discussion in which you jointly identify stressors, and then jointly find ways to change or mitigate the situation.

Solidarity fund

You can build a culture of care in the group with occasional regenerative trips and get-togethers. During them, don't discuss work topics, rather focus on cooking, playing board games, cleaning the space together or something else. This will help increase group harmony and prevent burnout. What you can also establish is a solidarity fund. It is a type of financial or other form of contribution that can be made by anyone who is able to do so and to the extent that they are comfortable with, ideally for a specific reason. A member may need help funding therapy, medical checkups, or something similar, or the group may want to go on a trip that requires funding. Depending on the needs of the group, you can use the solidarity fund in different ways, and the goal is for the group to help carry

the burden of individual or collective healing or rest with joint efforts, as much as possible.

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