

**CITIZENS AS CSR PARTNERS**  
**Experiences of partnerships between Citizens' organizations and Businesses**  
**in Europe**  
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In the framework of their activities related to the "citizens' side" of corporate social responsibility, the Active Citizenship Foundation (FONDACA) and Cittadinanzattiva / Active Citizenship Network (ACN)<sup>1</sup> have carried out a twelve-month project<sup>2</sup> supported by DG Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission and aimed at filling the existing knowledge gap on the cooperation between citizens' organizations and companies in the development of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.

As a matter of fact, Citizens involved in companies' activities are one of the most relevant actors of CSR. The active role of citizens is what makes the difference between CSR and traditional forms of "social dialogue", as it is stressed in the 2000 European Commission Green Paper on CSR. However, there is a lack of empirical information on citizen-corporate partnerships which reflects a general problem of CSR, i.e. the knowledge of concrete experiences is very limited compared to the existing ones.

The first aim of the project is thus to improve the knowledge of the nature, main features, operational patterns, strengths, constraints, outputs and outcomes of the citizen-corporate partnerships, as well as to clarify the added value both for companies and citizens' organizations of partnerships in the field of CSR, possibly enriching the present debate on the "European partnership style".

The second objective is to strengthen citizens organizations' participation in corporate social responsibility policy, overcoming their well-known reluctance to collaborate with private companies, as well as encourage companies into a stronger commitment to create partnerships with citizens' organizations, overcoming the temptation of a self-referential approach to CSR.

In order to reach this second goal, the project team will propose guidelines based on the project results aimed at supporting companies and civic organizations willing to build CSR partnerships. They will also create a "network for partnerships" specifically devoted to citizen-corporate cooperation. This network will include the participants in the project (both the project partners and the interviewed civic organizations and companies) and build relationships with other public and private bodies engaged in the development of CSR in Europe.

The project has been implemented through the involvement of national citizens' organizations in 9 European Union countries<sup>3</sup> and the gathering of information on 36 concrete national experiences. These experiences are analyzed in a European report, which will be the basis for guidelines aimed at facilitating the creation of new partnerships. Both will be presented and discussed in the 5<sup>th</sup> International Seminar on CSR organized by FONDACA and Cittadinanzattiva on 30<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> July in Frascati.

The project has been developed as follows.

1. **Preparatory studies:** development of a first proposal of methodology and meeting with the partners in order to discuss and agree on the methodology.
2. **Selection in each country of 5 CSR partnership experiences<sup>4</sup>** involving together companies and citizens' organizations. These experiences had to reflect the two CSR dimensions: compliance with norms and standards, and promotion of social, civil and environmental development.
3. **In depth analysis:** each partner interviewed one representative of the company(ies) and one representative of the citizens' organization(s) in charge of managing the partnership through a questionnaire based on the analytical scheme used by the Copenhagen Centre.
4. **Drafting of a Final Report** containing the main findings (comparative information) as well as research recommendations as final result **guidelines on partnership building**.
5. **Organization of a Final Conference** in Frascati (Italy) to present and discuss the the Final Report and the guidelines. The conference is expected to have about 200 participants (representatives of companies, NGO's, public institutions, international organizations) from all EU and candidate countries.
6. **Dissemination activities and follow-up.** Each partner will contribute to spread the results of the project at national level:
  - publishing the Final report on their own **websites** and organizing **national workshops** to present the report to opinion leaders, governments, trade unions and employer's associations;

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<sup>1</sup> Active Citizenship Network is the European Programme of Cittadinanzattiva Onlus.

<sup>2</sup> The project will end on 31 July 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Austria, Cyprus, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, United Kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> No example could be collected in Cyprus and in some countries the objective of 5 partnerships has not been reached

- spreading the guidelines on partnership building among companies and citizens' organizations.

The first outcome of the project has been the definition of CSR partnerships between companies and citizens' organizations as "*situations in which civic organizations and companies share objectives, resources, responsibilities and risks*". The meaning of this definition can be better understood by bearing in mind the following six principles, which are explicitly or implicitly contained in it. A partnership should:

1. Pursue *general interest goals* through common actions (which does not preclude partners from pursuing their own interests).
2. Be *innovative* in the sense that they should promote the exploration of new approaches to existing problems and opportunities, as well as new forms of relations.
3. *Involve a range of different bodies/actors*, coming from business and civic organizations (as well as the public sector).
4. Be *voluntary*, meaning that the collaboration should arise from a voluntary choice and not from a need to comply to laws or regulations.
5. Produce *mutual benefits and joint investments*, in which each partner has contribute with their own resources to achieve common goals, supporting the costs and assuming the risks involved in this, and obtain benefits.
6. Have an "*added -value*" effect, in the sense that through their collaboration the partners have to build something that is more than the sum of the parts and that none of them would have been able to obtain on their own.

The other main conclusions of the final report will be presented on 9 June in the framework of Politeia Third Annual Forum on CSR.