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Interview with Ing. Petr Kazda, Director of Partnership Environmental Foundation

Do you know Tree of the Year, Planting for the Future, and the Adapterra Awards? And do you know what an Open Garden is? Do you use Greenways? All this and much more is related to the Partnership Environmental Foundation in Brno, whose director since 2019 has been Ing. Petr Kazda. Why is climate change a challenge for him that can bring us new opportunities?

Mr. Kazda, you studied administration and management at the Faculty of Economics and Administration at Masaryk University in Brno. You started your professional life right after your studies in the organization you now manage. Do you remember the moment you decided to work for the Foundation?

Thanks to my external cooperation with Lipka in Brno, I had the opportunity to get to know the projects supported by the Partnership Environmental Foundation as the beneficiary. At that time, I put the Foundation on the imaginary list of my possible future employers. I gradually got to know the whole breadth of its activities. For example, thanks to travelling in the Romanian Carpathians, in which the Romanian partner of the Foundation supported the interpretation of local heritage; the Czech Foundation forms the international Environmental Partnership Association with other foundations in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

What was the first project you participated in at the Foundation?

I joined the coordination of the Cyclists are Welcome national certification. The head of the Greenways foundation programme at the time, Juraj Flamik, and the ambassador of foreign relations and tourism expert Daniel Mourek transferred this certification to the Czech environment based on German and Austrian experience. The aim of the project was to create a supporting network of high-quality facilities for cyclists on the main cycling routes, often leading

through river valleys. Hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, and other tourist destinations were thus preparing for the specific needs of this clientele. The cyclists themselves provided professional support in equipping the facilities at these places and also became promoters of certification in their clubs.

You have been working at the Foundation since 2005. Can you compare what the Foundation was like when you joined it and what it is like today?

There are many differences. From a small organization with fifteen employees based in several offices in the centre of Brno, it is now a respected partner in the field of adaptation of landscape and urban areas to climate change with more than fifty employees, its own educational facility, and a laboratory of adaptation measures – Open Gardens. In this green oasis below Špilberk Castle in Brno, the Partnership Environmental Foundation is based together with organizations such as Frank Bold and Friends of the Earth Czech Republic.

In 2019, you took over the Foundation from Miroslav Kundera, who had led it for 25 years. It must have been a challenge for you to take over the organization from a person who made a significant contribution to its development.

Miroslav gave me a lot of space to gradually implement changes in management; together we prepared the Foundation for strategic planning with the involvement of all colleagues. It was a good procedure that prepared one well for handing over the management of the organization after so many years. Miroslav remains at the Foundation in the position of Strategic Director and founder of a number of programmes – from the Tree of the Year and Planting the Future to the Open Gardens and now the Partnership for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine.

From a team of three in 1993, the organization has expanded to 53 permanent employees who have been helping in the implementation of more than 3,500 projects. Is there still room or potential for further growth?

Foundation programmes are evolving and changing. Last year, the project Živá půda, led by our colleague Zuzana Benešová, experienced the most dynamic development. The project offers advice for landowners, generating and rating of lease agreements, and is behind the creation of the Platform for Regenerative Agriculture. The farmers who are involved present the principles and proven practices of arable land management that lead to its restoration and thus support the restart of landscape functions.

A significant step for the foundation was the launch of the Partnership for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine. This programme seeks out, connects, and also educates local leaders from Ukrainian cities, municipalities, universities and media during weekly internships in the Czech Republic. The most pressing internship topics are waste, water management, and power engineering. The goal of the programme is to strengthen the absorptive capacity for quality, sustainable projects of the local Ukrainian administration and to support a bottom-up transformation of the environment and adaptation as a cross-cutting theme of all investments. Thanks to the internships, the first partnerships and specific supplies of technology from Czech companies are created. The programme is based on Miroslav Kundrata's experience from the 1990s; thanks to the Foundation, a number of Czech civil society leaders and mayors completed similar internships in Western Europe and the USA.

You participate in the support of cross-border projects. Is the Foundation's ambition to expand its activities beyond the borders of the Czech Republic?

We want to continue to strengthen the European reach. From Brno, we coordinate the European Tree of the Year survey. People from our individual programmes are involved in the activities of transnational associations from the Climate Alliance to the European Cyclists' Federation. In Brussels, we „share“ colleague Adam Holub with the European Landowners Organisation.

In addition to supporting external projects, the Foundation also has its own projects. As an example, I will mention the very successful Adapterra Awards project and the Tree of the Year project, which is very popular among the public.

Do you have a project hidden on the back burner, so to speak, that you would like to implement, but for some reason it has not been possible? Alternatively, what new projects can we look forward to in the future?

We are following the process of implementing the EU Nature Restoration Law into national policies. I suppose it will give us more room for cooperation with farmers. In municipalities, it will increase their awareness of the impacts of farming in the agricultural landscape and ways of managing water, and thus also the awareness of the link between the health of the surrounding landscape and the quality of life in villages. We are therefore preparing a fund for the recovery of the Czech landscape, which will provide both assistance and support to smaller municipalities, the transfer of good practice, and financial support for such innovative projects that would not receive support from SEF or NCA CR.

What do you see most as an appreciation of your work and the work of your team?

The answer follows from the name of the Foundation. One of our values is healthy partnerships. They are manifested in the trust of our supporters, philanthropists, as well as beneficiaries. In the implementation of their and our projects, the involvement of the public is essential. Simultaneously, it does not work without trust and openness of municipalities, cities, and regions. The appreciation is these partnership ties, which make it possible to have the impact in local communities and their immediate surroundings.

In your latest newsletter, you speak, among other things, about the way our country is able to implement changes in the landscape, such as widening rivers, returning wetlands to nature, and so on. Why are changes in the public space of urban areas so much more complicated?

This does not apply in general. It depends on local conditions, the complexity of ownership relationships, the state of complex land improvements and so on. When improving the quality of public space in cities and towns, it is necessary to include adaptation measures in the investment: natural cooling of the space with water, evaporation through greenery, water capture and its retention for later irrigation. It is important to choose the right composition of trees, taking into account the future development of the site – for example, traffic needs, further development in the vicinity, and maintenance requirements. Solving conflicts with technical networks can be difficult.

What does climate change mean to you as Foundation Director?

Last year the Director of TEREZA, Educational Centre in Prague, Petr Daniš, published the book *Klima je příležitost (Climate is an Opportunity)*. It's the same for me. Climate change accentuates the need to restore the functions of our landscape, its water regime, and improve the quality of life in urban areas. It creates pressure for efficient and decentralized energy solutions, for saving resources. It brings a new perspective on externalities – for example, how a new production hall mitigates or worsens the effects of climate change. In general, the entire area of green construction is a huge opportunity, strengthened by efforts to mitigate and adapt functionally to the impacts of climate change – from the use of recycles to water management and on-site recycling and reuse to island energy solutions.

In connection with climate change, we read on your website that increased temperatures can even affect the taste of Czech beer due to the effect on the quality of hop cones. This is certainly bad news for many Czechs. ☹️

We are not yet sure if their impact could also be an improvement in taste. ☺️ In any case, for many patriots and consumers of these products, it will be balanced by the increasing quality of Czech and Moravian wines.

Mr. Kazda, thank you very much for the interview.

**Ing. Josef Nistler
Mgr. Zuzana Řehořová**

Ing. Petr Kazda

Ing. Petr Kazda was born in Brno on 27th April 1981. While studying at the Faculty of Economics and Administration of Masaryk University, he assisted externally in Lipka, a school facility for environmental education. This experience guided him professionally into environmental organizations. He started working on Greenways at the Partnership Environmental Foundation. In the 1990s, this grant and assistance programme supported the creation of multifunctional trails for transportation and recreation, both in natural river corridors and, for example, on defunct railways. The Foundation allocated these activities to its subsidiary Partnership, o. p. s., which Ing. Petr Kazda led for seven years. The company is still behind projects such as the Moravian Wine Trails, the Elbe Trail, and Cyclists are Welcome certification. He became the CEO of the Partnership Environmental Foundation in 2019.

