



Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block
Grant and Scholarship Fund
2012-15
– Summary and
Evaluation

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Head of publishing: **Veronika Móra**

Authors:

Evaluations: **Boglárka Bata, Tibor Béres, István Dandé, András Száz**

Project descriptions: **György Kerényi**

Editors:

Virág Csóli, Zsuzsa Foltányi

Graphics, layout: **Garamond GM Bt. Gyöngyös**

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Introduction

The Swiss Confederation, according to its agreement made with the European Commission in 2006, provides a contribution of a total of 1 billion Swiss francs to the ten countries that have acceded the European Union since 2004, for 5 years, with the purpose of reducing economical and social disparities. Hungary has received over 130 million Swiss francs of support from the programme, which could be spent on the development of five main areas, which are the following: (1) promoting economic growth and improving working conditions, (2) improving social security, (3) protecting the environment, (4) improving public safety and security, (5) strengthening civil society. The donor has allocated a total of 6 million Swiss francs, that is, a financial envelope of app. 1.45 billion forints for the latter area – together with the Scholarship Fund supporting the further education of children from marginalised backgrounds.

The practical implementation of the NGO and Scholarship programmes was not carried out by the national administration of development policy; but rather it was assigned to an external, so-called intermediate organisation, selected through tendering. The invitation was published at the beginning of 2010, and the consortium of four members – Ökotárs Foundation (as the leader), Autonómia Foundation, DemNet Foundation, and Carpathian Foundation-Hungary – with an experience of working together efficiently gained through previous cooperation, submitted a successful tender. The trilateral support agreement was signed in the middle of 2012, after a longer period of preparation, and so the Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant and Scholarship Fund was launched.

The goal of the **NGO Block Grant** was to strengthen the organisational capacities and to improve the performance of non-governmental organisations as service providers working in social and environmental fields, in the regions of Northern Hungary and Northern Alföld (Nógrád, Heves, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar or Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok counties), focusing on two themes: (A) provision of social services, (B) responses to environmental challenges. Within the first theme, special emphasis was given to projects aiming at the integration and social inclusion of the Roma. The total amount to be spent on support provided by the fund was HUF 1.08 billion (4,500,000 Swiss francs), and provided support in three categories:

- micro projects: between CHF 2000 and 9999, that is, HUF 481 560 – 2 407 560;
- medium projects: between CHF 10 000 and 49 999, that is, HUF 2 407 800 – 12 038 760;
- large projects: between CHF 50 000 and 100 000, that is, HUF 12 039 000 – 24 078 000.

In addition, the supported organisations were required to provide their own financial contribution of at least 10%.

The goal of the **Scholarship Fund** was to support complex projects that assist disadvantaged and marginalised students from marginalised backgrounds begin or continue their secondary education throughout the country, so that they can successfully complete their studies and/or progress into higher education, acquire a profession. Beside non-governmental organisations, local municipalities and educational and social institutions could submit tenders as well. The support envelope of the fund was HUF 216 million (900,000 Swiss francs), and the maximum support per project was set at CHF 150 000, that is, HUF 36,117,000, plus their own financial contribution of at least 5%. Each project was required to use this to provide catch-up support to at least 50, 7th-8th grade or secondary school students.

Originally, the intermediate consortium planned to allocate the funds of the NGO Block Grant in three open calls for proposals, and the funds of the Scholarship Fund in one round. However, as more large scale projects were awarded support in the first round than expected, only two calls were announced eventually. The first one in the autumn of 2012, and the second one a year later; the decisions about the allocation of the funds were made in February and March of the following year. Since the programme was active until the middle of 2015, the maximum duration of the projects supported in the first round was two years, while that of the projects supported in the second round was one year.

A total of 111 projects – 102 NGO and 9 scholarship ones – received support, concluded a contract and were implemented in the two rounds, according to the following:

Beside the financial support, the members of the consortium provided a lot of assistance to the organisations involved, during the periods of application, contract conclusion and implementation: they organised theme days and workshops, made guides, and promoted the establishment of connections between the supported parties via networking meetings. Tasks

Theme	Year	Micro	Medium	Large	Total
NGO Fund – social services	2012	5	9	17	31
	2013	14	22	-	36
NGO Fund – environmental challenges	2012	7	7	10	24
	2013	3	8	-	11
Scholarship Fund	2012	-	-	9	9
Total		29	46	36	111

were divided by theme within the consortium: Autonomía was in charge of the social projects, Ökotárs of the environmental projects, and Kárpátok of the scholarship ones, while DemNet was in charge of the financial control and background work. All supported projects had a personal "owner", a programme manager that contributed to the successful implementation via keeping in touch regularly and giving advice. Possibly partly due to this, none of the projects failed – there were only two that needed to be aborted at mid-term, all the others were completed successfully.

The projects supported through the NGO Block Grant involved a large variety of topics within their own themes, but their common feature was that they were implemented for and involving people living in marginalised areas in the target regions: children and adults, villagers and city dwellers, Roma and non-Roma – they engaged or had some sort of effect on tens of thousands of people in total. The average length of the 9 scholarship projects was 23 months, and they granted access to financial and other kind of support (tutoring, skills development and community experiences) to 679 children in total.

On the next pages, we would like to provide a comprehensive overview of the three-year operation and results of the Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant and Scholarship Fund through the content analysis of the project documents, a questionnaire-based survey carried out among the applicants, and the more detailed introduction of some of the successful projects. Our hope is that beyond being a summary of experiences and conclusions, this may serve as a useful source of information for devising other similar support programmes in the future. For further information and with your enquiries, please feel free to contact my colleagues at the foundations!

Veronika Móra
programme director

Evaluation of project reports

I. Introduction, evaluation aims and methodology

The Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant and Scholarship Funds managing consortium completed the content evaluation on a 25% sample of supported projects. The aim of this was to survey the harmony of the call text and the purposes of the contributing organization, and the aims and results of the projects.

The consortium examined the projects by content and results, therefore the analyses wasn't restricted to quantifiable indicators, but practically encompassed the entire project documentation including grantee reports, appendices, project-level evaluations conducted by the intermediate consortium, notes and opinions. A survey of project results, social impact, and programme-level impact had also been conducted.

The call specified subgoals within two main thematic areas to guide the professional content of applicant projects. Following the first call's conclusion and its evaluation in 2012, the second call's goals were simplified. Certain subgoals were merged, and the social area no longer defined Roma integration as a separate subgoal, which was omitted from the call (considering how the allocated resources for this area were entirely used up in the previous round), whereas the original idea was to have a separate Roma integration category in the second round as well.

The subgoals were determined as follows (the listing features in **bold** those subgoals featured in both calls, normal type for those in 2012 only, and *italics* for those in the 2013 call only.)

Provision of social services:

- 1) **identify missing service areas not covered by state actors and service provider NGOs in social services, health care and social protection schemes, develop effective and successful programs for solving the problems, foster co-operation of state and non-state actors in the social areas, and operating these programs for disabled unemployed, homeless, elderly persons, children, women, drug users etc.;**
- 2) **improving cooperation between state and non-state actors;**
- 3) **continue developing new and/or existing**

standards for social services through multi-stakeholder participatory processes, NGO-state or municipal actor consultation processes, both formal and informal, depending on the context and the opportunities, and local legislative initiatives;

- 4) **build capacities so that NGOs can offer their services in a good quality (incl. e.g. licensing for certain services) and act as eye-level partners, including the ability to mobilize outside resources (human and financial); learning about transparency and accountability requirements, in particular with regard to service provision in a local context;**
- 5) **developing and operating model value projects and services to enable the social inclusion and integration of Roma populace;**
- 6) **enforcing the involvement of civil society with special regard to volunteer work and establishing novel, innovative approaches currently absent from the area in question (adaptation of working methods from abroad; developments based on community participation; harnessing the synergies of different sectors cooperating.)**

Responses to environmental challenges:

- 1) **build a positive image of environmental NGOs and activists involved in policy-**

making, through effective actions and campaigns, create a positive picture in the public opinion about related activities;

- 2) **strengthen policy advocacy skills of environmental NGOs and activists** (*initiate and organize environmental advocacy campaigns which will enhance local support and strengthen the involvement of local community*), including the monitoring and influencing of the developments, implementations and compliance of local and regional legislation, planning and policies, planning environment improving alternatives, analyses, recommendations and research and designing their realization, as well as the implementation of similar campaigns and activities;
- 3) develop model projects of root cause sensitive, locally focused, environmentally friendly holistic solutions that are long term sustainable;
- 4) activities and projects that promote integrating environmental priorities into other areas (eg. land use, agriculture);
- 5) **raise awareness of the target groups through concrete actions in preserving the environment for further generations;**

- 6) development of local NGO's, capacity building for successful project development and project operation.

The scholarship call was made only once, in 2012. Project requirements were specified as follows:

THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND aims to support **complex projects** that enable marginalized students to commence or continue their intermediate studies in order to successfully graduate and move into higher studies or vocational training.

These complex projects are to **provide scholarship support** to marginalized children, as well as **programmes** in which **children are sided directly or indirectly in completing their studies and progressing to higher education, as well as improving their employment outlook** (mentoring, tutoring, language learning, career orientation etc.); as well as **contributing to these children's social competence and healthy personal development** (community sports, cultural and other activities, study trips, camps, clubs etc.) Applicants may decide which programmes to offer children in a **complex project**. Project implementers are however required to provide at least 1 community activity for the participating children (eg. a visit to a museum, exhibition, zoo, a field trip, group activities etc.)

The two main documents related to the evaluation are the Small Project Implementation Guide which gives a detailed description of programme aims, and the Small Project Evaluation Reports regarding the project implementation made by those associates of the managing consortium responsible for each particular project, and which was the basis for validating the reports.

A total of 29 projects were subject to evaluation. Of those selected, 18 were social, 9 environmental and 2 scholarship-related. Some relevant aspects of sample selection were the project theme (a first-round requirement for at least half the selected social area projects was a Roma integration focus), the type of settlement the project was implemented in (town or village), the year of application (2012-2013) and project size (micro, medium or large project support).

Social and environmental areas were evaluated using different templates, considering that the successful implementation of the

projects and their professional content could not be evaluated uniformly because the call had varying requirements. Considering the low turnout for scholarship projects, no separate template was devised for that area.

II. Aims and characteristics of supported projects

Projects in the study sample fell into the above specified subgoals by content as follows:

	Project content	Number of projects
Social area	Service providing	13
	Development, adaptation	0
	Capacity building	5
Environmental area	Specific activity	7
	Policy changing	0
	Systemic solution to local problem	2

For scholarship projects the call made clear the required results in advance, it was in the developmental methods used in each project that unique solutions gained ground.

As the data clearly shows, distribution by subgoals was uneven. The social area was dominated by service providing, which often enough implied hardly more than continuing regular organizational operation with some minor adjustments. Specific activities were popular in the environmental area, dominated by attitude-shaping activities.

For both areas we saw a general need for organizational capacity building of some degree to enable the service provision, devise educational materials, or develop methodology. There were hardly any clean-cut projects that focused solely to one subgoal or another. Projects that would have resulted in developing or adapting new methods, and the drafting of local or national level policy recommendations were not to be found in the sample.

Out of the social area projects evaluated, not even those projects undertaking some sort of development actually contained an element of real innovation. There was slightly more creative innovation present in the environmental projects, and a special mention is due to the interactive online game presenting the Nyírség region the reach of which regrettably fell short of expectations; also the Nyíregyháza-based shopping community project "Kosár" which implemented the priorities of community development as well as the original concept of enhancing producer-consumer relations. This latter project's most innovative element of introducing local hairdressers and beauticians into the

"Kosár" community however did not prove successful to the developer's satisfaction.

As for the field of **social services** hardly any of the sampled projects considered their services the

responsibility of state or local government administration, but the issue of authoritative competence did arise during projects' implementation, and the blurred dividing line made way for overlaps between project services and public services, for example state education services. One such instance was the cultural public workers government programme (TÁMOP), reaching 4000 participants by 2015. The

participating public workers undergo a rapid training course and are set to work, among other tasks, developing local communities, surveying needs for services and thereby organizing community services – similar activities were undertaken by the NGO Fund grantees. Another notable instance of overlap would be the relation to local social service systems: one supported project provided homecare help to elderly Roma people, because they couldn't access the local social services (they were refused service).

There were other "borderline" projects in the social service area. One was a project focused on chronic kidney patients undergoing dialysis, by organizing and managing a peer support group. These activities belong as much to public service as to social service scope. The same applies to cancer patient rehabilitation projects.

The sampled projects with a **Roma integration** focus have produced satisfactory target group reach and involvement. One surveyed project raised doubts as to the appropriate choice and design of method. The service they provided (various training courses for young Roma) was already accessible through the local employment center, in fact conducted by the same trainer the supported NGO invited for the job. For the rest of the Roma integration focused projects, services meshed with local needs, were addressing shortcomings and giving adequate solutions to problems. Most projects sought solutions to high unemployment and related low income issues, for example through vocational training for a 15-person livelihood-providing agricultural programme, or reducing home expenditures through an energy saving biobrick fuel programme.

In the **environmental** area, the almost total lack of “classic” advocacy activities and policy-making background work was somewhat made up for by the widespread professional lobby work which, though making no breakthrough on relevant national policy, did have an impact on local level decision making and public discourse. One good example is the project promoting straw bale architecture, which involved consulting the local building control authorities, promoting straw bale architecture and presenting the relevant regulations to uninformed technical staff.

Most applicants can be observed to have included in their project – supposedly based on their previous experience in different application arrangements – activities which were not an integral to it. Typically these included conferences and the establishing of formal collaborations. These were fulfilled as indicators, but in many cases the professional content was subpar, eg. inconsequential partnership agreements, low turnout conferences etc.

In case of **scholarship** projects – as mentioned above – the required aims and goals (enabling further studies for disadvantaged children) were defined in advance by the donor, the applicants were given no room for freedom of choice in this area. Yet the supported projects proved very diverse and innovative, from musical talent mentoring and reading skill boosting to social competence development, encompassing a variety of forms (mentoring, field trips, sport, cultural and other developmental group activities.

III. Results and outcomes of supported projects

28 of the 29 projects were concluded successfully*, that is the supported organizations fulfilled their contract obligations. All the same, almost half these projects showed some degree of deviation from their planned indicators, but these were insubstantial, usually just one indicator's underfulfillment compensated by another's overfulfillment.

The projects that really merit attention in this regard are the ones whose reach and/or involvement of the target group fell severely short of expectations (this implies two environmental and one social project, which constitute 10%

of the surveyed projects.) This phenomenon can be traced back to errors made in the project design phase, most probably the applicants failed to properly gauge the need and demand for their planned project. The other typical area of project underachievement was low attendance for camps: “our target neighborhood is disadvantaged, even paying a 50% reduced participation fee is beyond most peoples' means.”

Most of the proposals – including the environmental sector whose proposal writing and administrative skills tend to far surpass the social area's – failed to specify indicators and attainable aims for measuring the success or implementation of the project. (The scholarship proposals are an exception, on account of the call itself having included the main requisite indicators.) In many cases it fell upon the intermediate organizations during the contracting process with the supported organizations, to define and record output of the activities, the indicators and the types of documents to support them. It was an important evaluation result that even where there were unambiguous and measurable indicators, there was often a lack of logical link between the specified indicators (results) and the expected social impact. For example, one project specified its aim to “increase social solidarity and acceptance of the Roma populace in the programme's target area, development of employment, public health and social service system conditions and support joint efforts that aim for their improvement.” The project successfully employed 15 people, and carries on its activities after the project duration, but there is little doubt as to the lack of strong cohesion between the project's immediate achievements and the very general goals it set.

The two surveyed scholarship projects were also successful in fulfilling their target indicators, despite how in one case the participant children's study grades – despite commitments for their improvement – actually declined. The grantee explained that changing schools (advancing to middle school) brought new grading practices, resulting in the decline of participant students' grades. Experience also shows that appropriate methodology in complex development (a parallel development of cognitive and social competences) even in the short term can result in multiple disadvantaged and/or impoverished Roma children successfully advance to

*The organization failing to conclude its project encountered difficulties because in autumn 2014 (for the duration of the irregularity procedure initiated against the programme by the Prime Minister's Office) the suspended funds were delayed and thereby the project implementation entailed a public debt, which it failed to pay off, and therefore became ineligible to its next funding installment, thus the project had to be left off before completion. (The problem was still in effect at the time of evaluation.)

secondary education, and achieve vocational degrees and graduation. Also remarkable is how one of the two projects made serious efforts to involve the participant children's families, parents, in order to ensure that supporting the educational progress of their children becomes a priority. These activities go far beyond a mere scholarship programme and its expected impact, as it is due to the mentors' direct, personal developing that the support (both financial and intangible) has a lasting long term effect on the lives of children and their families, and that social issues and shortcomings are not addressed on a case-by-case basis.

IV. Innovation, methodological sophistication, and model value of supported projects

As noted previously, only a fraction of supported projects showed innovation in the literal sense of the word, and expecting the development and implementation of previously unseen methods and solutions from our applicants. If we take into consideration the working environment of the applicants, namely the most disadvantaged and underdeveloped regions in Hungary, then the idea of novelty might also be approached from a different angle. Perhaps none of the surveyed projects actually came up with anything brand new and original, yet their solutions may just as well carry an element of novelty in the locality of their operation, in the target group that they work with.

With Roma focused projects, community development is one method with no claim for any methodological novelty, yet in case of Roma integration it is a definite step forward for isolated segregates. It is also important for these projects that the intermediate organizations often experienced that methodology was only present in the proposal (courtesy of the proposal's author), with no personnel for its on-site implementation.

For environmental projects the "general novelty" was professional use of social media. All of the surveyed green projects made good use of Facebook and other webpages in reaching and involving their target groups.

In case of scholarship projects innovation was most forthcoming in the methods they used in development. One of the two surveyed projects actively involved the parents, and organizing community activities for them can be considered an innovation, while in the other case there were exceptionally colorful and worthwhile activities for the children (concerts, trips, drama groups etc.) which can contribute to overcoming the disadvantages stemming from a

lack of cultural capital. In effect this means that parents with low schooling usually lack the learning and competences that might support their children toward higher schooling.

Volunteer development was implemented by practically every sampled green organization, but only three of the sampled social organizations. However two of the social area projects were specifically aimed at preparing volunteers. One prepared a volunteer each for a city district to assist locals and keep up contacts. The other project was focused specifically on supporting the social involvement of Roman Catholic young women. Several of the scholarship projects (including the two surveyed) provided volunteer development to children and young people as well as their helpers, developmental teachers, mentors, tutors etc., primarily for the sake of sustainability.

Nearly all green, and 11 social grantees (61% of the sample) compiled a project publication presenting their method. Substantial professional content useful in the field of activity or for the general public was only produced in one environmental and two social projects of the surveyed sample. One of the latter materials was so heavily religion-based it could hardly be considered for secular use. The other technical leaflet was notably innovative and stopgap in its own right: "Advocacy for abused Roma women, the forming of self-organized groups."

V. Partnerships, embeddedness, publicity

The green organizations' genuine civil background and attitude towards their focus issues were immediately forthcoming. The social area however had a large proportion (20% by estimate) of projects whose concept was admittedly borrowed from a professional proposal writer. Consequently neither target group nor organizational staff were involved in these projects' design and preparation work. These projects invariably turned out the most problematic in the implementation, and often the assigned project leader or organizational leader was incapable of providing relevant information regarding the project's professional content – except in cases where the proposal writer participated in compiling the reports. These projects were less adapted to local community needs, participation and project content was often formal, and project sustainability was indiscernible after the project's duration.

Many of the environmental projects displayed well-rounded and clear logicity, but the social need addressed was often questionable. This showed up in turnouts 10-30% below expectation, and sustainability failures after project duration. This latter is exemplified in how five of the green projects surveyed undertook major webpage development and intense Facebook activity, which practically ended with the project.

All Roma integration focused projects involved Roma participants in the implementation. All such organizations surveyed were led by ethnic Roma, and only four of total 17 organizations in this general category were non-Roma managed. Two of these provided services to Roma people, while the other two actively involved their target group in design and implementation processes.

Of the surveyed projects, two green and one social had partners, and the latter partnership was limited to securing the project location without professional-contentual contribution.

A total of two of nine supported scholarship projects had a national scope, the other seven – including the two surveyed – were local level, project staff in direct contact with participant children and their families even during the design phase. Therefore these programmes addressed real needs using diverse developmental methods. All projects faced oversubscription, with significant demand for their programmes, which were realized in broad partnerships (schools, parents, social and cultural institutions, NGO's etc.)

Publicity requirements were met by every surveyed project, while some projects (not surveyed) were visited on site and observed not to have met public appearance guidelines.

The public representation of environmental projects again seemed more professional and coherent. Two of the surveyed organizations were staffed by professional media workers. The two distinct areas showed far less dissimilarity in their traditional media representation, this is all the more apparent in the design, and professionalism of their publicity use and the quality of their own publicity materials. Nonetheless one of the social projects had come up with perhaps the best quality media content, though the short films were in fact produced by a professional film workshop commissioned by MTVA. The films are available on YouTube under the title "Kellene kiskert bötermő".

Environmental projects used social media not only as a publicity tool but a means of project community organizing. This was a feature almost entirely haphazard or lacking from social area projects. It follows that social projects made little effort to mobilize the community beyond the project (including media mobilization), or were far less professional than green projects.

VI. Observations regarding implementation

Every surveyed project was concluded at the time of surveying (one at its half-time, see above.) One scholarship project's administrative issues were reported by intermediate organization associate, and corrected before project completion. Two social organizations' concluding reports were significantly delayed, and one encountered a public debt due to delayed funding and resulting in serious financial jeopardy.

As prescribed under programme procedure, professional monitoring was conducted by area-specific consortium foundations Autonomia, Ökotárs and Kárpátok, while financial monitoring was seen to by DemNet Foundation. No substantial professional implementation irregularity was found in any of the grantee organizations, while three social projects incurred major financial shortfalls affecting project implementation. In one case the grantee made corrections to amend the situation, while two organizations had expenditure items (property refurbishment related acquisitions) rejected by the intermediate organization.

Generally green organizations display a higher level of administrative background than social ones, which nonetheless include professionally operating and service-providing organizations whose projects were seamlessly implemented. These organizations are mostly urban based and work with diversified target groups (eg. Roma, homeless, vulnerable youth.) Even they had issues due to the general delay in intermediary and/or final payments previously noted.

Regarding the submitted project documentation, the intermediate consortium found that reports were transparent and satisfying when grantees were given a report template to fill out with their own specific results. When grantees were free to hand in reports in any format of choice, the reports became intransparent. In light of this circumstance, Appendix 1 (on activities and indicators) of the Small Project Implementation Agreement was used to compile customized templates, where grantees were directly involved in

appointing the supporting documentation to be submitted along with the reports.

About three out of four project contracts required modification, one in three required repeated modification. Modifications mostly involved extending project duration and reorganizing budget items by category. The latter maneuver was flexibly facilitated by procedural regulations (no advance approval required for modifications within 10% or 150 thousand HUF)

Most grantees regarded the procurement procedure (even the simplified three offer system) a pointless formality and fail to use it in optimizing project fund management. Prompted bids show no real competition, and often fail to comply with the most basic formal requirements (date, content). One underlying reason is that grantees have no interest in economizing budget items, or else the prices were previously agreed on with a selected contractor, rendering subsequent procurement insubstantially formal.

Though the managing consortium put special emphasis on encouraging project self-evaluation (with specially compiled methodological material, and a thematic day event focusing on evaluation), but this proved unsuited to grantee organizational culture. Only about 20% of grantees completed requisite project evaluations beyond answering survey questions, and these too lacked professional impact analysis. One of all surveyed projects produced such material, and it too focused mostly on performance indicators.

Scholarship projects were required to exercise constant monitoring, and keep track of children's development (using personalized development plans and progress logs), inciting grantees to consciously measure and follow through. This would have contributed to both sampled projects as well as all scholarship grantees successfully fulfilling their goals and indicators.

VII. General impressions, recommendations

During its implementation the programme underwent several changes. Most important of these was reducing the number of call rounds from three to two, and featuring the Roma integration aspect in the first round only. Implementation was greatly influenced by the temporary suspension of funding payments, officially starting December 2014 but practically in effect from October 2014 to late

January 2015 and affecting the entire programme. Nearly half of the surveyed projects (14 of them) noted that delayed payment affected implementation, and one grantee incurred a public debt for this reason, as yet to be resolved, and is thereby ineligible for the final payment. Supported organizations have no liquid resources to cover such liabilities. Likewise, the final 20% payment (a valid final account is prerequisite) proved beyond the reach of most, and many had to take on loans of various sorts to make ends meet. Perhaps the most important lesson is that the programme arrangement needs financial stability and a flexible, resilient procedural framework to provide necessary securities and guarantees to the grantees in such a situation.

The three support categories used in the programme were micro, medium and large. Difference in support sum magnitudes was up to tenfold. Support priorities included applicant organization's preparedness to manage large sums of funds – it was at least partly due to this circumstance, and the harmonization process preparatory to contracting, that none of the large-scale projects failed or were subject to irregularity procedures. The single instance of this happening was for a medium project, while one project each in micro and medium categories was closed at halftime. Regardless, survey showed no convincingly significant performance gap between micro and large-scale projects, thus it is difficult to argue that large-scale projects produce a proportionate amount of discernible added value. One definite advantage on their part is a longer service duration, but even that cannot be discerned as proportionately larger in reach than a much smaller budget project.

The intermediate consortium frequently held application prep courses in target regions, but this was in itself insufficient, often only attended by professional proposal writers rather than the actual applicant organizations.

Based on the above we may declare that resources aimed at target region NGO's would be much more efficiently used through a more differentiated and responsive support system:

– Service providing was most in demand, calling for a definite normative inclination of the support structure (while also maintaining and even requiring developmental perspectives). This would enable an objective evaluation of project performance and cost-effectivity as well as provide grantees a secure framework, of financing among other things.

– A separate call for innovation, development and adaptation should be introduced, where dissemination activities would be a requirement for all projects.

– We suggest using a step-by-step approach to new or inexperienced organizations: small-scale funding, successful microproject completion would build up to progress in a unified grant programme and administrative framework.

– Duration of the fund programme should be left as long as possible, so that freshly started development can mature and once their outcome indicators are fulfilled they still might have time left for transfer and integration into the organization's workings (this could take well over a year, or even two.)

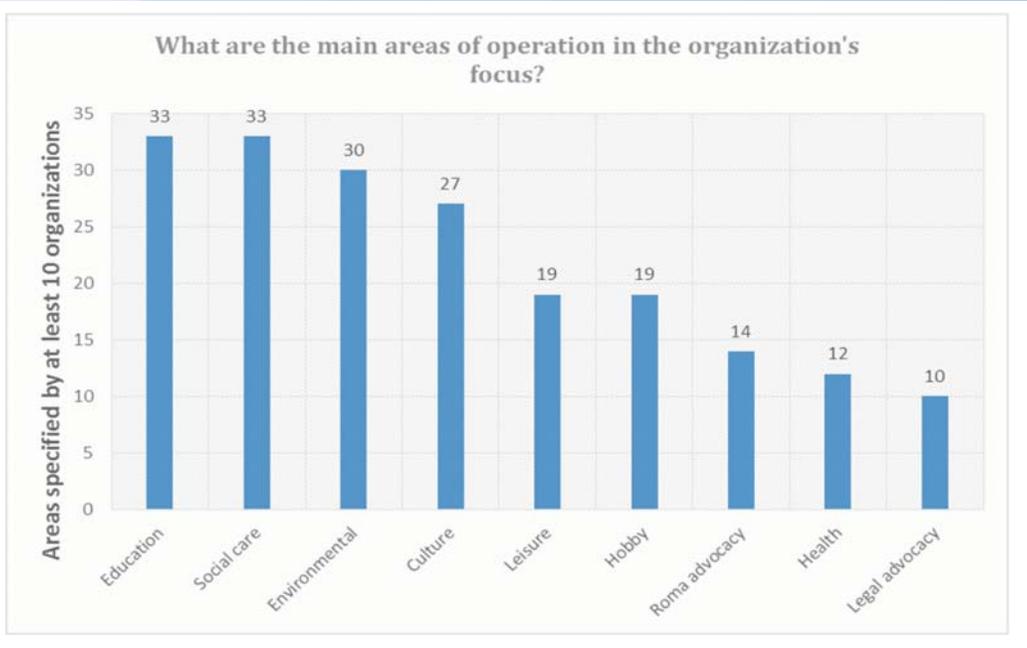
– Especially with small-scale grants a preparatory stage should be introduced, with optional consultation integral to the programme structure – to filter out inorganic project concepts, namely the professional proposal writing sector itself.

– Organizations involved with disadvantaged regions and target groups need intense assistance throughout the implementation phase – beyond training, workshops and written materials, personalized mentoring would also be required to be on call to ensure success.

Last but not least: in order for the truly niche-filling Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant and Scholarship Fund's results to gain hold, the programme must definitely be continued. The fund started a number of unique local and microregional initiatives which have little or no other means or resources to keep them going, and this especially holds for the scholarship programme. In extremely low capital target regions there is hardly hope for long term effects to be attained without outside help.



Questionnaire survey summary



Our questionnaire survey was conducted among the organizations that applied for the Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant and Scholarship Fund call.

The questionnaire was answered by 71 organizations. Of these, 58 organizations were granted funding, and 13 proposals were rejected.

Respondent organizations' most frequently mentioned fields of activity were education, social services, environment protection and culture. Though only 22 respondent organizations were supported in the “responses to environmental challenges” thematic area, this activity was highlighted among the main areas of operation for 30 organizations (multiple operational areas were selectable.) Diagram 1 shows areas of operation selected by at least 10 organizations.

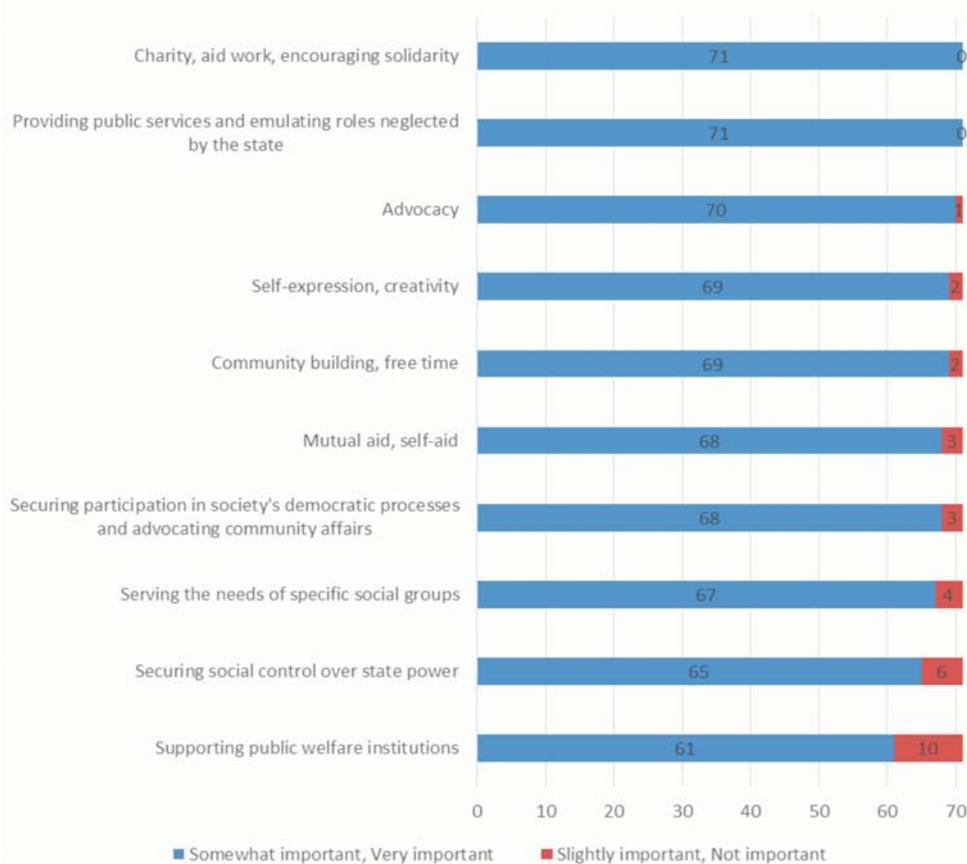
Of all respondents, only 1 organization specified no cooperation with other organizations, the rest of the respondents reported contacts to at least some other NGO's or local municipalities. 85% of all respondents (60 organizations) report struggling with long-term unresolved issues, even multiple ones. Besides financial difficulties, 33 organizations reported overworked participants, 11

organizations cited burnout. 10 organizations reported negative social estimation.

The role of the Hungarian nonprofit sector was overwhelmingly rated as at least “somewhat important” by respondents. Of the 14 areas listed on the questionnaire, 5 were rated as “somewhat unimportant” by at least 3 respondents:

1. Securing participation in society's democratic processes and advocating community affairs – 3 respondents
2. Mutual aid, self-aid – 3 respondents
3. Serving social groups with special needs – 4 respondents
4. Securing social control over state power – 6 respondents
5. Supporting public welfare institutions – 10 respondents

How important is the role of Hungary's nonprofit sector in the following areas to you?



According to feedback regarding most grant procedures, most organizations prefer an NGO grant system to be independent of state actors as far as possible. The majority of respondents expressed the opinion that the present system has basic operational flaws, and is also reported to be slow, difficult and in perpetual delay.

A weak divergence is discernible for two assertions, where organizations were divided 60-40 in percentage proportions between agreeing and disagreeing with these assertions: 1) Grant donors are responsible for present grantee problems; and 2) The present grant system's operation is compromised by corruption, whereby decisions are based not on professional but personal opinions.

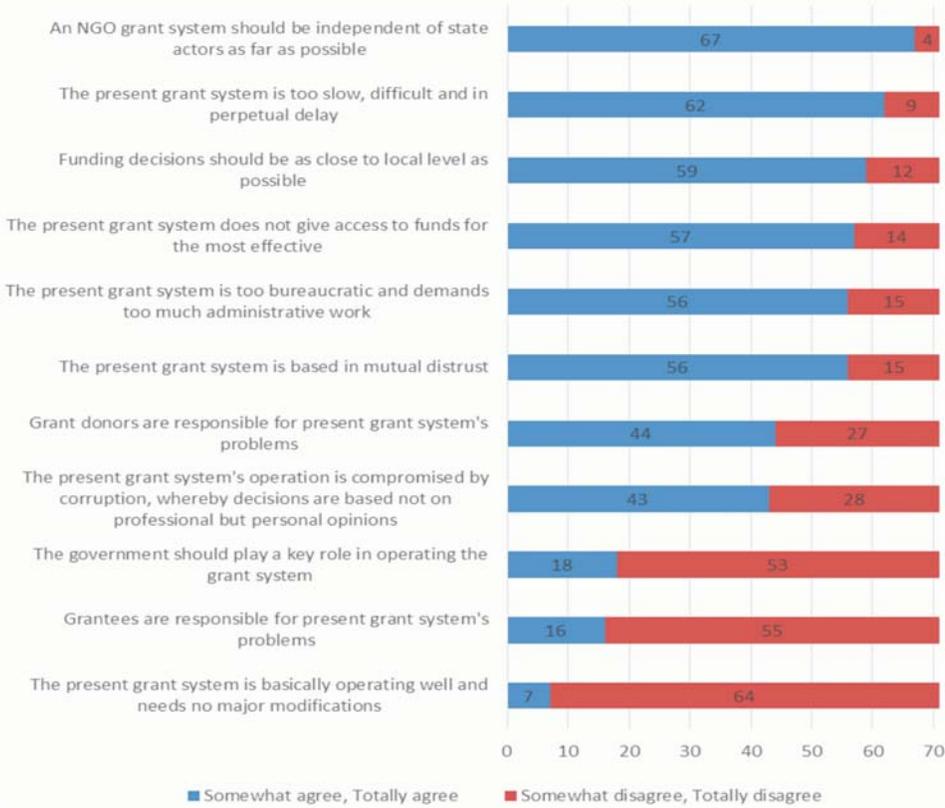
Winning proposals by topic area

Of the 58 applicant organizations, 30 proposed projects for "provision of social services", 22 for "responses to environmental challenges" and 6 for the "scholarship" area.

Provision of social services

The majority of 22 of the successful applicants are associations; there are also 7 foundations and 1 social cooperative in the thematic area mix. By experience, 12 organizations date from earlier than the year 2000, 17 organizations were founded between 2000 and 2010, and 1 organization was started in 2011.

To what extent do you agree with the following assertions?



A majority of associations, 18 organizations including the social co-op, have no more than 30 members, and only 3 organizations reported memberships in excess of 100. 27 of 30 organizations have volunteers helping their operation.

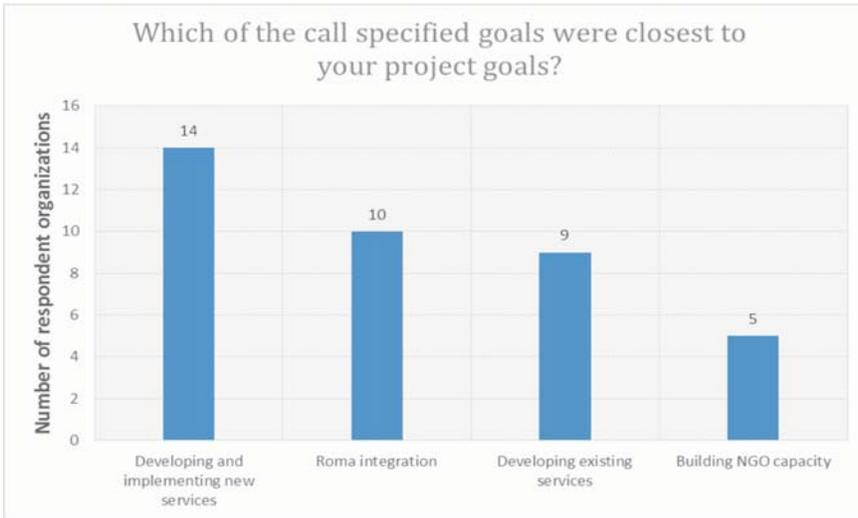
A majority of respondent organizations are located in the target region's administrative county seat. About a third of the organizations, 11 of them are based in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, and 6 of these are Miskolc-based. 6 of the 10 Hajdú-Bihar county grantees are based in the county seat Debrecen. Grantees are also located in Nógrád county (1 of 4 in county seat Salgótarján), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county (2 of 3 in county seat Nyíregyháza), and 1 each in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Heves counties, respectively. Only 6 out of 30 organizations are based in villages.

21 thematic area grantees received grant support in the first round, 9 organizations in the second round for realizing their projects.

Most of the projects included a goal of initiating a new social service, and every third applicant included Roma integration among their goals. While respondents were allowed to specify multiple goals, improving relations with the state and/or private sector wasn't mentioned among any of the projects' goals.

Most organizations focused on more than one target group in their project, while 7 organizations focused on only one target group. These latter were typically engaged with gambling addicts, convicts and chronic illness patients.

21 applicants declared their project-developed and initiated service will stay operational after the project was closed, and a further 6 organizations reported keeping up their service for some time after the project conclusion. 2 organizations were forced to discontinue their service along with the project, and 1 organization did not provide feedback.

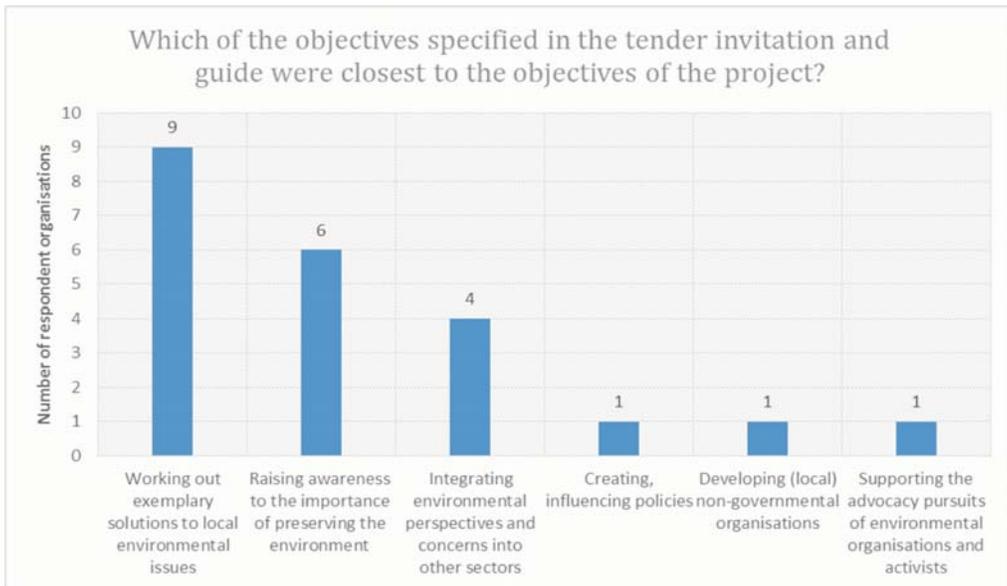


Responses to environmental challenges

The majority of the grantees of the environmental thematic area are also associations, 16 of the 22 operate as associations, and 6 operate as foundations. 9 organisations were founded before 2000, 13 of them were established

between 2000-2010, and none of the respondent organisations were founded later than that.

The member numbers of the 16 associations vary between 10-25 people; only 5 associations have a higher member number. One of them stands out with its 4083



members. The operation of 19 out of the 22 organisations is assisted by volunteers.

Over a half of the respondent organisations operate in two counties: 7 grantees are located in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, while 6 are based in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. 3 organisations operate both in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county and Nógrád county, and 1 each in Hajdú-Bihar and Heves counties, respectively (1 organisation did not respond). Unlike the respondents of the “provision of social services” area, half of the grantees of this thematic area, that is, 11 organisations are based in villages. 6 organisations are located in county seats and 5 in cities.

20 out of 22 organisations received grant support in the first round, while 2 of them in the second round for realising their projects.

9 organisations aimed to respond to local environmental challenges, while the projects of 6 organisations focused on raising awareness. The objective “integrating environmental perspectives and concerns into other sectors” was closest to the projects of 4 organisations. The other three objectives were each chosen by 1 organisation.

The objectives set by the organisations were accomplished in 20 cases, and partially in 2. All organisations will continue at least partially with the activities they started within the project; although “continuing with the activities started” was interpreted in very different ways by the respondents. The maintenance of the several kilometres of greenways established within the project, for example, means something completely different from the perspective of involving volunteers from envisioning the future only through further funding.

Scholarship projects

9 projects received funding from the Scholarship Fund. The questionnaire was answered by 6 grantee organisations, 3 of them associations, 1 foundation and 1 no-for-profit ltd. (1 organisation did not answer it). The foundation was founded in 1989, the not-for-profit ltd. and the associations between 2000-2010, and 1 organisation in 2013. The member numbers of the three associations vary between 13-16 people. The operation of 3 organisations is assisted by volunteers.

4 respondents specified their locations, they are based in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Hajdú-Bihar, Heves and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. In terms of public administration hierarchy, 2 organisations are located in county seats, 2 in cities and 2 in villages.

3 of the proposals that received funding from the Scholarship Fund got 60 children (each) involved in their projects; the other three projects got 75, 103 and 113

children involved. All respondents deemed that their projects had a significant effect on the children's lives. 5 grantees continue engaging with the children and following up their educational performance after the end of the project; their cooperation with the institutions involved will probably last. 4 organisations will apply the method used in the project in the future as well.

In terms of the effects achieved, better educational performance and a higher rate of further education are not the only ones the organisations have reported. One of them highlighted another positive effect, namely that the distances between children who previously were not in contact had decreased, thus the project achieved a significant integrative effect. The fact that the children involved did not restrict their choices to the local secondary school when studying further is a proof of their increased confidence.

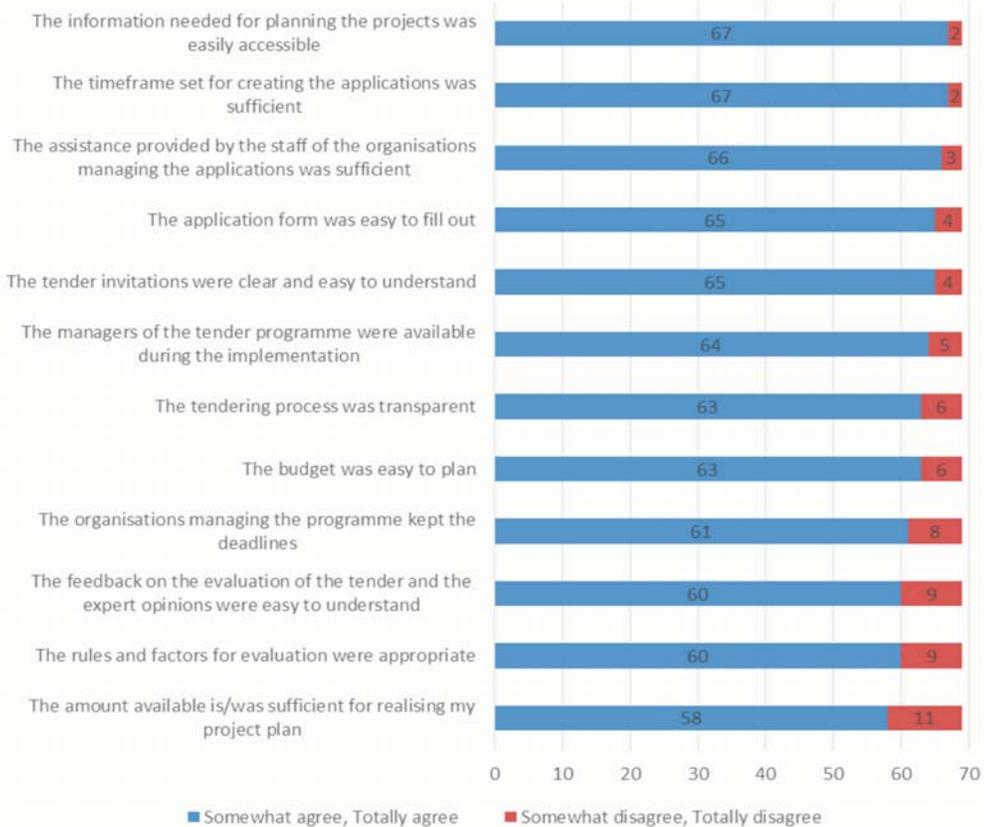
In the case of the continuation of the scholarship programme, the respondents agreed on only 1 out of 8 parameters that they would not change them: this was the one regarding the 10% management cost and the 50% cash ratio of the scholarships. Their opinion differed in all other cases. In their detailed comments, they propositioned to decrease the age of children to be involved, and the need of adjusting the number of students to be involved to the size of the grantee organisation. We received the important feedback that if the definition of “marginalisation” requires that the parents' highest completed level of education be no higher than 8 years of elementary school, this condition excludes many children – living in poverty – from the project whose parents are qualified as skilled workers. When choosing the target group, it would be advisable to consider not only the school year of the children, but their age as well; and also, a project with a longer duration could achieve more lasting effects.

An evaluation of the projects and the programme

Only one out of the 58 organisations rated the professional implementation of their project as 3 on a scale from 1 to 6, all the other self-evaluation rates are higher than that. In terms of technical implementation, only 2 organisations rated themselves with a score lower than 4. In these cases, frequent changes in staff, and a lack of management experience were the obstacle to a smooth technical implementation. 39 organisations deemed that the project they realised had some sort of an innovative element to it as well.

Within the areas regarding project implementation, usually 6-11 organisations did rather not agree or strongly disagree with the specific statements; these questions were answered by 69 organisations.

Do you agree, and to what extent, with the following statements regarding the implementation of Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant and Scholarship Fund programmes?



4 organisations were dissatisfied with the whole of the Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant and Scholarship Funds, 5 were half satisfied. 1 respondent organisation was not supported, and 5 did not answer. 56 organisations were satisfied, 41 out of these were very satisfied with the whole of the operation of the funds. The positive aspects listed at the further comments of satisfaction or dissatisfaction were, among others, the flexibility of the intermediate organizations, direct contact, being prepared; and the fact that the grant conditions allowed for implementing unique ideas. The fact that the responsibilities of the staff of the intermediate organisations were not clear for the applicants was mentioned as a negative aspect.

Among the rejected applicants, the evaluation of the whole of the funds is mixed. 2 out of the 13 rejected applicants were satisfied with the whole of the funds; in their view, the call for proposals always supported objectives relevant at the time, and usually they provided significant support to the sector. 3 respondents were only half satisfied, 4 organisations did not respond, and 1 gave the answer: “we did not win”. 2 organisations were not satisfied, and 1 was not satisfied at all with the whole of the funds. To support their evaluation, they highlighted that the proposal process was not clear and that it was greatly delayed; and that in their opinion, the financial and professional reasons of their rejection were unfounded.

Project descriptions





Give me your hand!

The segregated area on Széles út is not a great place to start a career. This is the Vlach Gypsy neighborhood of Tiszavasvári known for its school segregation incident some 20 years ago now. The elementary school's ethnic Gypsy graduates were given a separate ceremony on a different day than non-Roma "Hungarian" students. Discrimination led to litigation, and a few hundred thousand forint nominal compensation for the Roma family involved. If circumstances had somewhat improved, the hundreds of kids born and raised here aren't among the lucky few Romani admitted to Hungarian universities, who number only a few students per thousand.

This is where work started for the association led by Ágnes Kóka education specialist. A native to Tiszavasvári herself, she was raised in the more integrated Búdi segregated area of Hungarian Gypsies. In this Swiss Fund supported project they tried to keep all bases covered: Roma mentors (mostly from the Roma College for Advanced Studies in Nyiregyháza) met their student groups weekly; teachers offered development activities three times a week; career orientation counseling was used to put kids on track from elementary to secondary education; kids were given financial aid twice a year as well as in-kind support, clothes, shoes, or whatever they needed to participate in school and extracurricular activities without being subject to shame. "We incorporated a number of social elements in the knowledge of the kind of problems these children had, lacking bare necessities that needed to be provided before anything else," Ágnes Kóka says. On activity days (several a week) food was always made available.

All this was supported by an environment of community

building, and this turned out to become one of the program's biggest achievements. After the first year some of the programs were relocated to the Búdi segregated area, a steady source of replacements for graduated children (or those who dropped out). Ties between the two neighborhoods were greatly improved, participant children formed a community in their schools, and the once estranged people of Búdi and Szélesi segregated areas were now on good terms in their joint program. Sharing the common Gypsy fate does not in itself make a community, but a few competent animators can do wonders.

In the course of 25 months, 112 children from grades 7-8 participated, and 56% of them improved their school

grades, with three out of four entering secondary school and heading for graduation. "These kids need motivating, or things will just stay as they are," says Ágnes.

What does the future hold? Seeing the association's success, and the good relation to the segregated areas, many providers (e.g the private school operating in the area) started their own quality projects. "Swiss Funds gave way to realizing the plan of our dreams. The call conditions gave us a great deal of professional freedom." With the program coming to a close, "we'll transfer whatever we can to other projects, such as talent support. We're doing a lot of volunteer work here. Hopefully this community will produce some college grads eventually."

"You're doing things with our kids that nobody's done before," one parent commented to Ági and the staff. Perhaps the Hungarian school too will follow suit.

Name of organization: **Give me your hand! – Establishing equal opportunities in education and the labor market Public Utility Association**
 Location: **Tiszavasvári (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county)**
 Project title: **Give me your hand – aid network**
 Grant amount: **HUF 36 117 000**
 Project duration: **25 months**

Project goals: Providing Roma students with equal opportunities, as well as operating a community development program in multiple underprivileged Tiszavasvári Roma communities to achieve positive change in everyday community life, raise community members' awareness and assertive advocacy skills.
<http://www.addakezedkhe.com/>

Disconnecting from the big systems

She's busy making walnut leaf tincture in the kitchen of a 100-year-old farmhouse where all the shelves are full of the processed produce and fruits of the woods and fields. This is the time to pick walnut leaves, she says; she did something else yesterday, and will do something else tomorrow as well. And she's doing something very different from what she grew up doing. So Orsi Máthé and her peers are keeping up with the times, or rather, with time, the time and cycles of nature.

They give and take, primarily from and to nature, and secondarily among one another. They keep up with the times only to the extent that we arrange the interview via email, and that they use a car, sharing it, when they can't avoid needing to buy something in Eger. Well, there aren't many such things: eco-friendly detergent, beer and wine. "We start up the car once a week. We strive to use the tools in the most environmentally friendly way possible, sharing them among several families." But she doesn't necessarily say no to buying an electric lawn mower, either: "you cannot buy solar cells if you have minimal income." And they don't have much income; they barter whenever they can: they are paid in the form of labour and produce, and they pay one another the same way. Getting back to the walnut tincture: "if someone offers money for it, I will accept it, but I'm happier to receive 3 kilos of apricot because we can't grow that here."

So Orsi and the others left the city. "We moved to the countryside in order to disconnect from the big systems, wires, pipes, utilities." Independently, in a "self-sufficient" way, and finding joy in it all along, while hundreds of thousands of starving people wander the streets pressing the screens of their deaf mobile phones, streets that are ruled by Mad Maxes. It's an attractive way of life that has probably tempted most of us, but we never had the courage to actually do it, like so many other things. Because it's not an easy life, often with little comfort, not a lot of money, and you'll never have a big screen TV – all in all, you can't do it without deep commitment. You can feel this commitment about Orsi, in her quiet ways. "Our ultimate goal is a life that is attuned to the order and rhythm of nature. For this, we need to rebuild what used to be a communal knowledge and lifestyle."

They could have started up an eco-village, but for them, community building is also important. "I am not antisocial, I am happy to pass on the knowledge I have, I don't want to keep it a secret." "Back when I was at university I already had this notion that an eco-village is too homogenous a community. A viable community is diverse."

A village has its pieces of local knowledge and memories: "the elderly come to the seed exchange events – 'my mother used to plant this kind of beans'; they bring the seeds."



People used to grow pumpkins in Bátor, but they don't any more. "We would like to poke the village as well, get them to grow pumpkins again." They are trying to "steal" the knowledge back into the village, but the aim of the NGO Fund support was to strengthen the connection between village and city: "the city was calling at us, they wanted to come with children. They wanted us to make it all more organised." They sought connection in the city, they held a conference on urban gardens, they taught the people of Eger about balcony gardening. "Now I could live elsewhere, but I have already planted trees here."

They do not consider themselves orthodox, but they don't want to exceed their capacities. "We want to develop and not grow. If you're not growing, you'll die – this is an entrepreneurial trap. For us, development means that we are able to do it better and better, we are learning, too."

Name of organisation: **Banya-Tanya Foundation**

Location: **Bátor (Heves county)**

Project title: "**Bátor Cottage**" – **Village-city community building for sustainability**

Grant amount: **HUF 4 776 000**

Project duration: **14 months**

Project goals: Promoting a self-sufficient lifestyle in the countryside; creating a living connection between the village and the inhabitants of the nearby city; reviving the value of creative work; operating a money-free barter network between the village and the city; promoting environmentally friendly and cost-effective household solutions; collecting, organising, maintaining and passing on traditional farming methods and landrace – both plant and animal – gene pools.

<http://www.banyatanya.blogger.hu/>

<http://www.banya-tanya.hu/index.html>



The warriors of Bereg

It is sometimes chalks, other times ideas that a school needs. For example, the idea of sustainable development, something the Bereg Environmental and Conservation Association (Beregi Természet- és Környezetvédelmi Egyesület) has been working on for 10 years. Green organisations have been working on raising environmental awareness and engaging with youth for a long time, but even they experience less and less success. According to Sándor Inántszy-Pap, the driving force of the Bereg Association, it has become very difficult to get young people involved, even the ones that are more receptive. “They’re uninterested, they know nothing about the world. They go into the supermarket, buy what they need, but they have no idea about how things work, how things are made, they have no images in their minds. Teacher training courses are unable to keep up with social changes; the competencies needed to raise the interest of youth are missing. If we could reach them the way the global media is able to, it would be easier for us.”

So they worked with new methods in the Swiss project (titled: Youth Warriors of Sustainable Development). They had already changed their old practice that was based on lectures and frontal education: community development and giving students first-hand experiences had an increasingly important role in their work, but now they have technically retreated to the background and let the youth themselves – prepared and continually mentored by them -engage with their classmates and schoolmates. They promoted it among the secondary school students of the country (via Facebook, of course), and have involved 18 children from seven schools, most of them from Vásárosnamény, Nyíregyháza and Záhony.

They didn’t even enter the schools; it was the children who negotiated with the staff of each school to let them bring the projects there. “They know what it is that can raise the interest of their peers to sustainable development.” The children themselves evaluated one another, they carried out the work of

raising awareness, and the adults only joined the workshops to supervise them.

It all has a grand and global objective of course: creating a need for change, survival, and the mitigation of environmental and social issues, throughout society. The Bereg warriors will not get the US to sign the Kyoto Protocol, and they won’t be able to decide the fate of Paks, but these have never been their goals. It is to “push people out of their comfort zones” – Sándor says. They are 17-18 years old, “confrontation is the best method”.

“If we prepare people for the changes that are sure to come, then those who live consciously will not panic if there won’t be electricity for 3 days and they cannot go through the automatic doors of the multinationals. Those who are conscious have an alternative.”

The association doesn’t currently have a volunteer coordinator that could keep the children touched by the programme within their neighbourhood and do activities with them, but they still have 4 children that are active in one of their other projects, and there is one that appeared at the national meeting of green organisations. “The projects give them a great sense of success; the experiences they take home have ripple effects at least in their own classes. The kids are still very enthusiastic and in touch with us.”

Name of organisation: **Bereg Environmental and Conservation Association**
 Location: Jánd (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county)
 Project title: **“Training Sustainable Development Youth Warriors”**
 Grant amount: **HUF 2 396 000**
 Project goals: to train sustainability experts among secondary school students, who carry out activities in order to raise awareness among their peers in the secondary schools of the county.
 Facebook: **“Ifjúsági fenntartható fejlődés harcosok”**

“Here they've become a community”

Irma Kissné Pásztor, the head of the Foundation for the Communities of Bihar first shows me around in a 107-year-old house. The building has belonged to the association since 2007, this is where their programme supported by the Civil Fund took place, through which they “motivated” the disadvantaged of Szentpéterszeg “for a better life”, while involving the widest possible range of the local population into their community development efforts. They renovated the rear of the building through “the Swiss” as well. They have archives there, with the produce of their community garden in it, because they have that, too, and they will also have a community oven: behind all of their activities is the drive to create and catalyse communities in this village of 1100.

Their association has had a long history and significant influence in the region. In accordance with their deed of foundation, first they worked in rural heritage and tradition protection (they processed and presented the traditions and rural architectural heritage of the village and its surroundings in nice publications), held camps for children, and took part in international exchange programmes. They then started their social activities: a social workshop for the elderly, and their “tele-house”, which has become a model for such programmes at a national level.

“The goal is to create new communities” – Irma says. In the first half of the Swiss programme they held trainings, such as: team building, self-awareness, communication, motivational, job search, IT, and advisory on dealing with marital debt. “Then our Baby & mummy self-help club started, the Skillful hands self-help group, the Baking and cooking group for housewives, and the Margaréta self-help group” – she goes on listing them. A children’s psychologist, a beautician, a hairdresser and the retired cook of the kindergarden helped their work. Their goal was to involve 60 marginalised villagers, but they managed to involve 96.

“We always have an eye out for what people in the village need. Those above 50-55 have no opportunities at all. We also have a lot of people who moved here from the city after having lost their properties there due to debts and ended up here. Many people have come from Romania as well, and integration is very difficult for them without a family background or connections.” One of their target groups were the lonely and rootless, the other were parents staying at home with their children, and the third were the Roma. “The goal was to get them accept one another. Marginalised people always get isolated, but here they have become a community.” The heads of the groups were chosen by and from among them as well. Eventually they involved a tenth of the population of the village in their activities.

“It was good that we were able to modify the programme



while it was running.” For example, originally they planned 5 sessions for learning about traditional cuisine, but eventually it lasted for a year and a half. “It was a daily activity, it gave them meaning, and a rhythm for their lives. They couldn’t wait to be here. This is like our second home, one of them said.” Irma regards the Swiss programme as a big success.

“There is a pressure to develop and satisfy needs. We have to keep doing it, it never ends.” This will never maintain itself, although they have a few for-payment courses as well. “It was important for us to rely on several sources, and for what we do to be exemplary.” “We always escape forward, we need new innovations.” The association has had nearly forty employees during its twenty years, and no one has worked for a minimum wage. But of course they need the support of the employment centre as well. At the moment they have 8 employees.

“I’ve become infinitely tired. I’m going to retire, but there is a team now that can take it on. They can still count on me as the head of the association and as a helper.” They keep going forward with the community garden from their own resources. It’s the season of hazelnuts; two people are busy cleaning them next to us, to have something to add to the cakes in the winter. Because people will keep coming even then.

Name of organisation: **Foundation for the Communities of Bihar**

Location: **Szentpéterszeg (Hajdú-Bihar county)**

Project title: **Everyday tricks – A chance for catching up**

Grant amount: **HUF 24 066 900**

Project duration: **24,5 months**

Project goals: **Creating a multifunctional community space open for smaller communities, clubs and non-governmental organisations, and besides, motivating marginalised people and building communities.**

<http://biharkoz.hu/index.html>



The factory where daddy used to work

The Factory – as its name suggests – is a large factory site. It is the only indoor extreme sports arena (skating park, climbing hall, music studio, workshops) in Hungary, set up in a huge industrial monument hall, on a site which used to be a foundry. Loads of events, 25 thousand visitors per year, and in the midst of it all: Zsuzsa Egri, previously a human resources administrator. “All I wanted was to avoid having 170 kids gather in my apartment” – she tells me how everything began ten years ago. A mummy whose kids and their friends are obsessed with bicycles creates an association which now welcomes 25 thousand children.

There isn't possibly enough space here to list all the things that go on there, but what is for sure is that nothing that happens in the Factory is mainstream. Zsuzsa shows me around: there is half a bus parked in the basement, and school volunteers and not-for-profit workers are busy making paper bricks that they will use to build an Eiffel tower in the city centre. The design of the place resembles the Fekete Lyuk in Budapest in its golden era, only it's ten times as big and music and beer are only a fraction of what's going on here.

Zsuzsa Egri and her colleagues used “the Swiss” to take some of their activities to Komlóstető, a district of Miskolc that is home to a lot of marginalised children. (There are a few such districts here.) They renovated a club there, they lured in the kids from the street and from a few schools, and they started up creative, sports, musical, learning support and logical skills development workshops lead by professionals, and they also organised events that got the whole district moving. In the summer they took the children to the Arena for a three-day camp so that the number of participants in the workshops would not decrease during the summer holidays.

“We take in children that are in more serious trouble as

well, we see more and more problems” – Zsuzsa tells me about their factory site that houses six non-governmental organisations; one of them is the Mountaineers of Bükk, which ran the Komlóstető programme. The Komlóstető programme grew organically from the philosophy of the Factory. “Our goal is not training Olympic champions, but creating a space where the weak, the marginalised, even drug-users feel comfortable coming in. Bad children need to be mended.”

They managed to engage sixty children, including ten Roma. “Those ten children received something to take home with them.” Marginalised children are the ones that are not taken care of – according to Zsuzsa. “If we can do some maintenance on these children only once in two weeks, there will be development, they will see the good examples. This word is important for me when it comes to the marginalised: the good example.”

“The Swiss” is over now, but they haven't stopped, the children keep going back. “We cannot bring money to the Komlóstető programme from the Factory, but we were able to buy materials, tools, toys from the Swiss support.” The local schools act as partners, and the association is negotiating with the representative of the district in order to get new funding so that they can continue.

They have collected clothes, but they didn't just simply distribute them among the kids. “We held a fashion show, they were the models, and they could take home what they wore. This way we didn't humiliate them, and had good fun as well.”

“I have been managing non-governmental organisations for twenty years. During this time I have learnt three things: drawing kids together, creating a lot of debt and living a wholesome life.”

This year their big event, Factory Festival, was attended by a huge number of Gypsy children, for the first time ever.

Name of organisation: **Mountaineering and Sports Climbing Association of Bükk**
Location: **Miskolc (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county)**
Project title: **Differently in the Komlóstető club (MÁS-Kép a Komlóstetői klubban)**
Grant amount: **HUF 5 821 000**
Project duration: **12 months**
Project goals: **A community space for marginalised youth; operating four workshops; organising district days.**
<http://factoryarena.hu/>



Friends in need are friends indeed

Two Hungarian associations which, judging from their profiles, seem to have little in common. One seeks to aid diabetics, the other the Roma populated Szala neighborhood of Eger. Yet they managed to get together, thanks mostly to Kati Jakab, head of Diabetics Association Eger and known local public figure, who got in touch with Márton Bécsi and persuaded him to form an association for Szala, then invited him to participate in the town's Social Roundtable forum. Since then, last year saw the launch of Szala's own community center where the two associations hosted a string of joint events.

'The kids had no space of their own,' Kati recounts. As we arrive, the place is teeming with young people, Roma and Hungarian alike, and despite its Roma focus the association does recognize the fact that Szala has a mixed population. Even its name is identity-neutral: Szala Environmental and Youth Association.

'It's not as bad here as many Roma ghettos in the country, but "Downtown" Eger only ever saw the neighborhood as a gathering place for drifters,' Márton relates.

The Szala-based association cooperates with a wide range of organizations, keeping the center a busy place, but their main point of contact is through Kati and her association. The NGO Fund supported the Diabetics Association, including a plethora of events and public awareness raising, but Kati insists we go to Szala and discuss their joint programs with Márton. They had a Family and Health Day with 35

participant NGO's and town institutions, and offered a variety of health services, counseling, children's activities, family quiz games, handicraft activities, and a children's play center to an audience of over 400. This was followed by the Szala Advent Festivity with 75 participating Roma families, featuring hot food served for all, a Christmas mini train that took kids on a tour of the decorated Old Town, and a Christmas tree erected on Szala

Main Square, and all joined in the decorating fun with homemade decorations. A consultancy day event was also organized with 4 Szala participants joining Diabetics Association Eger.

'We want to join in the mainstream of city life,' says Márton, 'so we might be considered equals.' Support from Kati and the Diabetics Association proved invaluable in gaining acceptance for belittled Szalaiaans. 'They never used to come here from Downtown, now folk singers and everyone else are happy to perform here. People see now that there are locals here who want to move up.'

'We once declared a drawing competition called Szépül Szala,' Kati Jakab recalls. 'It was our work's highest acknowledgement when we saw ourselves, the two of us with Márton there on a drawing, surrounded by a lot of little brown dots. It's just the greatest gift one can ever get.'

Name of organisation: **Diabetics Association Eger**

Location: **Eger (Heves county)**

Project title: **Health and Social Counsel and Aid Service**

Grant amount: **HUF 2 407 300**

Project duration: **13 months**

Project goals: Diabetes awareness raising work, expanding existing advocacy, collaboration with professional and civil organizations, with special regard to low income elderly diabetics living alone, and the Roma populated Szala neighborhood.

www.egridiab.egalnet.hu



QR codes and plough irons

Treasurebox jewels are being sold out: UNESCO World Heritage site Hollókő homes are being offered for sale or permanent swapping for Budapest residences. This despite the site being a popular tourist attraction. The situation in the rest of Cserhát Nature Park's 21 settlements is even worse, and it ranks as one of Hungary's most underdeveloped microregions.

In an attempt to stem the outflow of local young people, the foundation operating the Nature Park bids to reintroduce them to the basics of village living. Reviving, compiling and transferring old know-how, they are assembling a sort of gene bank of the area's traditional fruit types. 'Soft sustainable development. Preserving the undisturbed countryside and finding new means of livelihood,' Éva Ispánné Péter lists their goals. 'Some of the work involves maintenance, some reintroductions, and some transfer as well.'

In contrast to the "world crunch", the Nature Park's civil actors offer "relearning" traditional agricultural practices, partly as a response to present-day subsistence necessities. "Greenways" are developed to encourage tourism, but producers too can benefit from them. Greenways connect communities through non-emissive transport, and offer locally produced artisan values as well as architectural and natural heritage. We can get behind a horse and use the ancient iron plough technology, but contemporary technology is also utilized to reach project goals. Anna Szikora used a geoinformational smart phone app to tour the 260 kilometer greenways. A QR code calls up the subpage where tour takers can browse all of 45 greenway's local attractions from

the historical ethnic Palóc Great Cross to József Kovács' special goat cheeses.

Traditional know-how was at first sought mainly by young intellectual settlers, then as community organizing activities took off and attracted more and more of the older generation. Herbs and spices, mushrooming, gastronomy and agriculture were just some of the areas explored in guest presentations of the living tradition.

Sustainability is reinforced by the fact that all villages within the Nature Park area are official members, and 2-3 contact people in each village are linked into the network.

'Nowhere is volume a priority for us,' the Nature Park is quick to summarize its "small is beautiful" ethic. Their attitude is similar to their fruit trees: ancient traditional tree types are grafted with the new. You can't plant cultivars on rocky slopes, but combined they can bring new fruit.

One of the Hollókő museum's century-old photo captions reads, "a spectacular memento of the small community's struggle to survive." The battle is still to be won.

Name of organisation: **Cserhát Nature Park Public Benefit Foundation**

Location: **Hollókő (Nógrád county)**

Project title: **Living Cserhát**

Grant amount: **HUF 10 762 000**

Project duration: **22 months**

Project goals: Sustainable development for the 22 communities in Cserhát Nature Park, by transferring traditional agricultural methods and available know-how.

<http://cserhatnaturpark.hu/>

“We're gypsies, but they still buy it”

There aren't many job opportunities in Southern Borsod, especially permanent ones. The one at the Roma association of Tiszatarján seems to be one of them. They grow vegetables and corn under plastic film and through outdoor cropping; during our visit there are twelve people busy picking tomatoes. Róbert Barna, the head of the organisation is a veteran (it's a bit sad that they already count as “the elders”), and he's an expert in managing organisations and tenders. He talks nearly as much about the acceptance and the coordination of the gypsies as he does about the economical details of the project. Both are interesting.

Regarding the latter, for example, the fact that out of the 15-18 people, those under 40 can only stay in this job supported by the NGO Fund and strengthened by public worker statuses for 2 years. “We do not send those above 40 to the primary labour market, but we do send the young. Of course we try to help them in what we can.” “It's not my aim to become an employment unit, to keep producing forever. If we do this for 20 years, it will be a segregated institution.”

They always spend their income on plastic tunnels, “one tunnel creates employment for one person”. “We will stop at 1000 quintals, now we're at 600. We don't necessarily need to keep growing.” His aim is to finance “modern advocacy” from their production.

They started out with zero knowledge about horticulture and they have had major fiascos, but they have learnt along the way, gathered experiences, and now they supply tin factories and wholesale markets on a daily basis. Their weekly average is 20-25 quintals. Each employee receives 10 kilos of produce per week as well. Last year they gave 70 quintals to the municipality as well, which helped soothe the slightly rough relationship. “Today there is a healthy competition between us, and the winners of it are the disadvantaged. They get to have a job, a living, and with the skills they learn they become able to do household farming at home, too.”

The image they convey of themselves is very important to Robi: the organisation, the Roma living in the countryside and in the whole of Hungary, of course. “It was important for it to be visible, so we didn't take the tunnels out of the village. Let us have an effect on people!” At first no one was willing to even lend them machinery; now they give it to them for free, he tells me.

We go over to the newly built, beautiful headquarters of the organisation. Offices, a smaller, but official meeting room, and a playground for the children in the yard. The building complex that cost 70 million was built from 4 sources, one of them the Swiss one. They would also like to build a stage, an exhibition room and a shop next to it.



“Others also produce and build things, this isn't really that much yet. The question is whether we can have an effect on each other, if we can send a message to the Roma, and the Hungarians. If we don't wear it down in 3 years, we can.”

We say goodbye, early next morning he's transporting the produce they just picked to Tiszaujváros. “I am the vendor at the wholesale market because we need their trust. Customers first re-measured everything, but now they trust us. We're gypsies, but still they buy it.” He bends over to pick up a hoe lying on the ground. “Things need to be tidy all the time. We haven't managed to learn yet that tools need to be put back to where they're stored” – he smiles.

Name of organisation: Association of Public Interest for the Integration of the Roma of Southern Borsod

Location: Tiszatarján (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county)

Project title: Starting up self-sufficient household farming that provides a supplementary income for the Roma families living in the Mezőcsáti subregion

Grant amount: HUF 22 110 732

Project duration: 18 months

Project goals: Starting up self-sufficient household farming that provides a supplementary income for the Roma families living in the Mezőcsáti subregion.

Activities: realising social employment (crop production) in a market environment, considering market mechanisms, with communal project components beside production-focused ones.



Dialogue at Avas

This country would be more livable if only some NGO's weren't filling the holes left bare by the state and market players, self-exploitably and scrounging for grant funding; but instead became the state themselves. Sometimes one can't help but surrender to utopistic visions, when faced with the competence and know-how of some civil projects. Members of Dialóg Association working in the Avas housing project of Miskolc, including their president Andrea Sélley, make one almost consider buying a flat at number 17 Szilvás utca, if only to take part in the work there. Avas isn't the most fetching corner of the world, with evicted and council-subsidized neighbors, residents dilapidated by decades of unemployment, roaches, and all that accumulated in the enormous housing project over its years of decline, originally erected to accommodate those heroes of Socialist society: the working class.

Yet Andrea and associates aren't doing anything particularly spectacular, "merely" enabling local residents to effect changes in their restricted living conditions. People have many different qualities and functions, but the place where one lives is at least one key factor. Walking the same stairs every day, shopping at the same stores, looking at the same faded square of lawn. Most people here will never get their own job, college degree and the parking place for the Merc, but they

can look forward to a more pleasant place to live. 'We're connecting to people based on locality here,' Andrea tells us.

But let's not rush ahead. Dialóg aims to generate neighborhood councils in Avas, a community of several ten thousand people. These micro-municipalities would take responsibility for their neighborhood, aggregate local issues and eventually shape an advocative community of these alienated and sometimes hostile residents. 'Sooner or later they'll start talking not only to us, but each other as well. Our goal is to give them a platform.'

People need a place where they can associate. Dialóg also provides community spaces. We're sitting in a recently

Name of organisation: **Dialóg Association**
 Location: Miskolc (**Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county**)
 Grant amount: **HUF 21 667 320**
 Project duration: **24 months**
 Project title: **TÉRerő – community spaces, processes and services at Avas**

Project goals: The communities living at the Avas housing project are activated by the association to assess their problems, and initiate services to address them using local resources. This is supported by the project's well-founded series of activities.

<http://dialogegyesulet.hu>

opened community café. They also have another community space that they managed to secure municipal funding for. 'It's a major achievement to have involved Family Care in these new community services,' Andrea reflects.

Before taking up work with the residents, community social work was needed too: 'Most of them are incapacitated to working, chronic unemployment has left people in a terrible state.' There was training available to locals 2 years back, and it is since then that one leads a sewing club, the other manufactures pallets. 'Many have stuck with us, there's formidable Dialóg identity here.' And the Dialóg staff, instead of embracing this development, declare 'it's a professional challenge to prevent organizing solely around Dialóg.' Andrea and her team aren't looking to solve local residents' problems, their aim instead is to enable people to solve their own problems. Locals formed TEA (Act Together for Avás), a local group that successfully manages assertively. 'The community organizer should remain an



instill in them a sense of responsibility to go beyond their professional obligations in helping the community they are working with. This is not supported by our culture, it is not done to move beyond the school walls.'

Mini-forums were formed within the Swiss funded project, and some institution heads started thinking outside the box together, the neighborhood's three locally elected officials, though running under different party colors, are 'sitting down at our table together and talking.'

'The Swiss project has made a major contribution to the process of locals representing their own interests.' Sustainability too is discernible, the neighborhood effort is included in a municipal project. 'The community space was adopted by the Family Care office, and we're in there too'; 3 community spaces have been opened; 'we've gained strength and become partners to the municipality. They have so much work with us, we're hoping the

council will have its own Avás contact person, freeing us from managing our communications with the government office.'

Already they are present in 10 out of 150 buildings. The Avás projects are coming into a future. People living there are now taking pictures of each other.



outside actor, observing from a distance. Community work isn't community organizing.' They also acquired a settlement flat, used only by neighborhood residents. 'People don't even need to knock, they can just come right in.' And let them figure out for themselves what they can contribute to the community. A young man came in and asked for a coffee, then considered paying for it – and opted instead to give an hour-long impromptu guitar concert for the rest of us.

'We need to cooperate with local institutions, and try to



Cornelius in Szolnok

Újváros is the most marginalised part of Szolnok. Previously an industrial district where factories and cultural facilities were closed down and only the people remained. And as usually, quite a lot of them are Roma. (This is where the famous Motor road and Gyár street segregated area can be found as well.) The House of Cornelius Missionary Association, a group of 11 friends started working here six years ago. “We were trying to see how we could reconcile the Roma and the non-Roma, how we could think together with them” – Anikó Hecker, the coordinator of the programme who has been working with gypsy people since '92 tells me. “How can groups of people from totally different cultures become a blessing for each other? We would like to help those that are not getting along find each other” – she explains their motivation. The core activity of the association is drug prevention: they organise free time activities for young people, and hold drug prevention workshops in elementary and secondary schools.

The organisation runs the Újváros Development Office in the district, which hosts their community events as well. The office manager, the social worker, the youth worker and the office administrators working here are all local Roma employed within the public employment scheme. They have held trainings for the 7th-8th formers through the Swiss Fund, and were able to give financial support of 45 thousand forints to their students that successfully passed their exams. 13 out of the 17 qualified for a certificate, and one of them has since acquired a driving licence and completed a computer training course, says Anikó. Additional things: communal cleaning in the district, family day and family sports day, and aggression management training for the civil guards crew of a mixed Roma and Hungarian background.

They also held weekly group workshops about self-improvement and community building for adults working in public employment and Roma children/youth. Teambuilding, self-awareness, confidence, interpreting the roles within the family – just a few of the topics the workshops touched on. They also launched a group for pensioners. “None of the pensioners are Roma, but they're still very marginalised.” And behind their wide range of activities: “They open up very much when they can feel that we would like to help them, just as they do when they can see that they're making progress.”

The centre will not close after the end of the support period: they have an excellent relationship with the municipality, their programme is a prioritised one in the city. “Our goal is to keep the people for the long term, make them capable of running programmes independently.” Two Roma women working in public employment have already made successful applications for municipal support by themselves, and the related accounting was also done by them.

“It is good to see them grow” – Anikó says. The office has 700 clients each year.

“The project stands as an example. The local integration of the organisation and the commitment of the leaders and workers are obvious.” – the final evaluation sheet of the programme reads. “The spectacular, large-scale programmes – such as the elimination of the segregated areas – did not care about the people, so they were not successful. We believe that people carry the most value. We may only start things within a small circle, but this is the only way to achieve anything. If the life of one person changes, in the course of a few generations, that will yield results. I only believe in investing in people” – Anikó says.

By the way, Cornelius was a Roman officer whose religious conversion made Apostle Peter, who used to have an aversion for the impure, the non-Jew, say the following: “God has showed me not to call anyone unholy or impure.”

Name of organisation: **House of Cornelius Missionary Association**

Location: **Szolnok (Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county)**

Project title: **A renewed Újváros**

Grant amount: **HUF 7 680 420**

Project duration: **13 months**

Project goals: Running a (community centre) development office in the Újváros district of Szolnok offering a variety of events and activities, based on the needs of the local families, many of whom have become disadvantaged. Activities: education for adults, community events, clubs, organising trainings, inclusion activities.

<http://korneliusz.hu/>

Hair salon for the needy

There is a high concentration of Roma-focused organizations operating in the village of Hernádvécse (and compared to my visit here 20 years ago, the number of Roma people on the street is negligible) yet most have been fronts from the outset or in a state of decline. One of the few that remain operational is Barna Horváth's organization.

A total of 230 schoolchildren have attended their study group, and they carry on working even as they wait for grant money to arrive. Their study group profile has been adjusted by Türr István Fund management, Barna and his group will probably be assigned to develop art skills. A wooden cabin is under construction in the yard, and activities can no longer stay in their usual beautiful home setting.

Their grant proposal for the Swiss Fund was based on the fact that a range of services are entirely unavailable to the village and its environs, including a discontinuation of council social care since 2006. The association used the grant to offer the village poor some services: free hairdressing and gardening work. Once the support money ran out they kept the services up as long as possible, until only the hairdresser was left working: at market prices now, making a meager turnover.

Both jobs required tool acquisitions and rentals, Kati gave all customers under 14 or over 55 free haircuts, and the rest were charged a nominal sum of 1000 forints. The two of them did garden work, chopped wood, mowed lawns, taking on the house chores that elderly people couldn't manage by themselves. Support ran to financing 3 employees and one coordinator.

Was this a successful project? Yes, the hair salon gave its 175 customers a total of 1461 haircuts. The gardening work (lawn mowing, scrub clearing, wood cutting, earthworks) was required by 64 people a total of 435 times. The gardeners as well as the hairdressers only had to put up the cost of their gardening machinery. Of 239 people served, 203 were from Hernádvécse, 23 from Pusztaradvány, and 27 from Hernádpetri. Based on worksheet information, the total number of services provided amounts to 1896.

On another note, once grant support ran, those employees unable to transfer to some state subsidized work project found themselves out of the project. Barna (himself a former vice-mayor) and the Hernádvécse municipality weren't on good terms. Consulting others revealed that most council members represented a small in-group of the local Roma population. This may well be the reason Barna and his project weren't welcome by the municipality, and they couldn't participate in the local job center's workfare program.



Whereas here in one of Hungary's most disadvantaged microregions, a market capable of supporting market services is not about to emerge anytime soon. Not to mention the chances of the non-service sector. There is a need for social services all the same: the state and the municipality should support employment to raise the standard of living for the locals.

One village entrepreneur managed to develop a building into a multi-star hotel. Nightly hotel rates are into the ten-thousands in forints, featuring a riding school and wellness services. The castle is said to employ no villagers at all. There was a "casting" session for parlor-maids, and the applicant Roma women were all turned down for visibly lacking several teeth. These issues interconnect. If the state decided to invest in its neediest citizens (in this case financing free dental care or workfare salary to a social hair salon) chances for these people's employment in the primary labor market would greatly improve.

Name of organization: **Hungarian Village Gypsies Agricultural Association**

Location: **Hernádvécse (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county)**

Project title: **Hernád River Bustle Service**

Grant amount: **HUF 7 187 900**

Project duration: **12 months**

Project goals: **Services provided to underprivileged residents: garden work and vegetable patch preparation, firewood processing and hairdresser's services.**

<http://www.mfcsz.hu/>



Fluffy bunnies for the heroes

A store-room full of packaged bathtubs, shower basins, food, huge piles of clothing, books, toys, and a whole big box of fluffy bunny figures. The mission of Adam Kosztyu Memorial Leukemia, Cancer and Zemplén Foundation for Children with Disabilities is to help families with children suffering from chronic illness, in particular leukemia and bone marrow transplantees. Every year in Hungary, 300 children are diagnosed with this condition, Viktória Kosztyu (the foundation takes its name from her son) and Marianna Hardiné Pásztor tell us. Both had sick children for over ten years.

Beside from a great deal of these children coming from a poor background, the regimented way of life that the 6-month treatment prescribes for years after is notably expensive. Special diet, constant sanitation and confinement go alongside the physical pain, psychological ordeal and social challenge. There is a great need for material, technical and information support. Hungary has no rehabilitation facility for these patients, the families are left to manage everything as best as they can on their own.

Just consider a simple ambulance ride to the hospital, which would require the vehicle's full disinfection before use.

In order for the transplant to be successful, the entire immune system must first be eradicated. But let's not dwell on the condition, and turn back to the Foundation.

This was the first time I caught a glimpse of the social space behind the all too familiar image of a bald headed child, where the social divisions of poverty and inadequate social and management skills are present just as they are among the healthy. All this is topped with the vulnerability faced by all involved with public healthcare. The third and

Name of organisation: Adam Kosztyu Memorial Leukemia, Cancer and Zemplén Foundation for Children with Disabilities

Location: Miskolc (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county)

Project title: KELL: equal opportunities information and fundraising point

Grant amount: HUF 22 384 440

Project duration: 24 months

Project goals: Operating an equal opportunities information and fundraising point with personal outreach onsite at Miskolc Hospital.

<http://kellalapitvany.com>

<http://2004kosztyuadam.hu>

<https://tegyot.hu>



worst burden is the illness itself, which affects not only the sick children but the entire life of all their family members. I am told that eight out of ten families break up before they're through. In the end, not everyone gets better, regrettably. Marianna and Viktória both avoid mention of angels in their games and storytelling, and stick to fairies instead. Angels have quite different connotations.

They are busy preparing their annual Fairy Camp in Sárospatak, available to all children who are able to attend. They offer arts and crafts, various adventure activities, and a range of guests from commandos to historical traditionalists give complimentary performances to the kids confined for most of their lives to aseptic rooms. Providing the appropriate hygienic environment and diet (no fruit, no candy) is a special challenge for the organizers, and proves to be a severe drain on funds (despite their receiving some generous discounts.) This led them to seek a building to buy in Zemplén county, where they could hold the camps. Usual turnout is 150 people, post-treatment kids and their parents attending camp.

The aim of their Swiss project is to operate an equal opportunities information and fundraising point for chronically ill children and their families, with personal outreach and counseling available onsite at Miskolc Hospital. They make a

round of the hospital ward twice a week, helping parents manage administrative work (from care allowance applications to public health care) and keep up an awareness raising campaign. Their Tegy jó! (Do good!) webpage allows sponsors to select children and make direct transfers to their bank account.

Viktória just brought in two cheques, one for a mom who speaks only Ukrainian: one of many such Transcarpathians coming here to escape treatment at home, rumored to be good as fatal. They give her a tour of the ward, fully equipped with furniture and TV sets and wheelchairs provided by the Foundation to make these struggling children's lives more comfortable. 'You only understand this from the inside. Entering here is like stepping through the gates of hell.'

'What can we do? If we have one forint, we turn it into many. These children are heroes: they're fighting a struggle we can't begin to imagine.'



So that somehow we can feel at home in it

We are going to a fruit processing plant to get some “Beszterce” plums with László Takács, the head of the Cultural Association of Onga and teacher and deputy director of the elementary school. He's a historian specialising in local history. He's wearing a leather vest and his hair is in a ponytail. First he plans to dry the fruits, but when he sees the quality of the plums, he decides to make pálinka instead.

In the course of a few years, he has managed to make Onga, a historic town near Miskolc with a population of 5000, the host of the biggest pálinka competition in Hungary. In Gyula, where the “national level” event used to take place, there were only 525 entries, while they have over a thousand. He has written several textbooks and books on local history, he's the collector and catalyser of the historical knowledge and self-awareness of the town. Birth certificates issued in Onga dating back to 1943 can be found on the internet, and the amount of books and publications that they have written about the history of Onga probably compares only to those written about Budapest. “We need reference points, and their own town could be such a thing for everyone. I collect and write things down so that they can have something to hold on to.”

“I felt very proud when my first book was published. I wrote textbooks, and then after that was over I found something else.” Now the main goal is the pálinka competition. They also hold pálinka trainings, attended even by university-level pálinka producers.

“Although we haven't got any funds, we're still doing local history-related activities as well.” They take photos of tombs, houses, and have compiled an art collection album as well, but eventually they will not make applications for funds to publish it. “The funds of the civil sector have dried up.” They cannot build a new stage, and there is no money to make new statues for the “pedestrian street” of Onga either, but they have other plans: they would like to create an exhibition space next to their

community hall, with attached accommodation and an educational centre.

Three Roma public workers have already learnt the nuts and bolts of processing fruits; he calls them as we're on the way with the plums, and they start processing them straight away to make pálinka from them. There will be a farmers' market held in their yard on Saturday, and 17 of the 22 members of the association will be there, he says.

They used the Swiss grant to open an educational garden, engaging the children as well: each tree has its own care-taker. Fruit processing (they have a huge “gömöri” style fruit drying oven, also through the Swiss fund) and educating people about related knowledge and skills is connected to this. “You have to be doing something” – he says, and he is indeed constantly doing something. “There are times when I feel I have had enough.” “You have to build islands, you cannot solve all the problems of everyone.”

It is upon meeting people like László Takács that an outsider can understand the true importance of leaders and catalysers in the civil sector, regardless of any organisational development or SWOT-analysis. “An NGO can function only if its leaders can accept the fact that the others will never work as much as they do” – he says. He's also a local representative and he always gets the biggest number of votes, but he hasn't got any political ambitions.

They have planted 500 fruit trees through the programme. They must continue.

Name of organisation: Cultural Association of Onga

Location: Onga (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county)

Project title: Creation of a communal fruit bank and educational garden

Grant amount: HUF 3 585 000

Project duration: 12,5 months

Project goals: Creating and operating a fruit bank and an educational garden, with the purpose of spreading and practicing the centuries' old tradition of growing fruits and the idea of self-sufficiency in Onga and its wider surroundings. Teaching the students of the elementary school (65% of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds, mostly Roma) about the basics of fruit cultivation and varieties. Building a fruit drying oven.

<http://www.okeonga.hu/>

The Guardians of the Galaxy

Despite their modest looks and the occasional bad press coverage they get due to their easily triggered nature, bees are rather interesting creatures. They are the guardians of biodiversity; according to a quote attributed to Einstein, their extinction would infer the extinction of humanity as well, as there would be no one left to pollinate the plants; and we are only at the beginning of discovering the secrets of their group behaviour.

I learn these things from István Gyarmathy, the secretary of the Debrecen-based Rónaőrző Association (who by the way works for the Hortobágy National Park). I also learn from him that every sensible association is formed by a group of friends. In theirs, for example, fans of vultures, botanists, and bee and butterfly enthusiasts came together, among others. Everyone brings in their own hobby, for which the association provides an organisation, and possibly funding through tenders.

In the case of the Rónaőrző Association, the Civil Fund supported raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity through the example of the bees, which was implemented via an agile selection of the right target groups. First they took the children, who tend to be afraid of stinging things, but usually love honey. The members of the association tackled this cognitive dissonance through talks, handicraft workshops and honey tasting so successfully that only one child ended up being stung by a bee, who happened to be the daughter of István Gyarmathy, so in her case it can be seen as an event of occupational hazard. And then, there were the garden enthusiasts, who form another solid, although less spectacular group within our society. Our heroes convinced them to be the friends of the bees through the promise of creating a wildlife-friendly garden (with interesting and professional publications, a talk series and the creation of a showcase garden).

The association, with a long history behind its back (they have build a flood gate, they bought 100 acres of land – “in order not to let it spoil” –, and have also surveyed areas across the border which then they got declared protected), also invited one of the international “popes” of alternative (that is: not industrial) beekeeping for a talk series, which stole even the hearts of “black belt level” beekeepers –

attendees came even from Bulgaria. With the purpose of promoting natural beekeeping, they made two “top bar hive” type showcase hives as well, which were installed in the Botanical Garden of the University of Debrecen.

“You have to seek out already existing communities” – István says. “We are a true grassroots organisation, the basic motor of our work is our enthusiasm.” “This was our biggest project in raising awareness and education so far.”



The limit is the sky: the association has also included light pollution in their conservation efforts – the creation of the Hortobágy Dark Sky Park was initiated by them.

Name of organisation: Rónaőrző Conservation Association

Location: Debrecen (Hajdú-Bihar county)

Project title: Come and be the friend of the bees!

Grant amount: HUF 3 234 000

Project duration: 12 months

Project goals: Raising awareness about the importance of preserving biodiversity through the example of the bees; presenting concrete options for action; promoting wildlife-friendly gardens and natural beekeeping through the use of the “top bar hive”, previously unknown in Hungary.

<http://ronaorzo.csillagpark.hu/>



Until our last breath

Zsolt Horváth, the driving force of the Roma association of Szalonna welcomes me in a low-spirited mood. They are unable to pay the electricity bills, they have no internet. He's showing me the carpenter tools they bought with the "Swiss" support, and which they used until the end of the project, but now the large saw blades are hanging on the wall. They have a piece of land and a tractor, pigs, geese, chickens and an incubator.

They have a public employment programme running, but within that they can only pay wages to the 37 public workers. They keep working on the land, the animals make noises behind the community hall, but everything else has come to a halt, including their educational centre. „We would need funds – the representative of the Sport and Community Development Association of Szalonna says” – to buy, say, 10 cubic metres of wood so that we can produce wooden goods for the village. But now we're just halted.” When I ask him whether they have tried applying for a “Leader” tender, he gives me the same answer: beneficiaries need to pre-finance everything out of their own resources and they receive funding only afterwards. They have seen better days before; one year the association had a budget of 200 million.

They used to have a settlement programme; he shows me

the house where they had two young couples move in. With the help of their “Start” public employment programmes they supplied the villagers with vegetables as well. “Even though I had no idea what agriculture was. I looked up everything on the internet, how and when to do things, and I have an acquaintance that gave me advice. We never had any problems.”

40-50 children attended their educational centre, and not only gypsies, 30% of them were “Hungarians” (as they refer to non-gypsy Hungarians). The teachers came to teach here from elite schools, and they offered to keep coming once a week even after the support period was over. “We achieved that instead of the very low standard vocational school of the

Name of organisation: **Sport and Community Development Association of Szalonna**

Location: **Szalonna (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county)**

Project title: **Community Service Model of Szalonna**

Grant amount: **HUF 18 828 000**

Project duration: **20 months**

Project goals: A complex programme offering services, training and employment to the low-skilled people with weak prospects in the labour market living in the village.

<http://www.sza-ke.hu/>



neighbouring town they went to better institutions that give them secondary-level qualification.”

This community hall was envied by many, he tells me. The “Swiss” programme was also running smoothly, the men did carpentry and the women kept laying hens and grew seedlings. “Since we began doing this, more and more people have started to keep livestock, they buy chickens and pigs from us.” The sties were built through the Swiss support. They do the livestock farming within the public employment programme, which would be a sign of sustainability, but they are unable to pay their basic overhead costs. The public employment programme only pays the

wages; the accountant and the transactional tax needs to be paid by them, so they need 50 thousand a month. This is covered by income from the livestock, and people also give them 500-1000 a month from their public worker wages. Everyone can get work through public employment, he says, because the municipality is also running a programme, but people are in a rather bad shape due to the permanent unemployment that has been going on for decades. “I taught them how to work.” He has a job at MÁV (Hungarian National Railways).

Most of my people are women, 27 out of the 37, and 3 of them are not Roma. He

also includes elderly people about to retire in the programme: six people are above 55 (one of them had one year to go until retirement, and he keeps thanking Zsolt every day ever since he employed him), and three of them have a limited working capacity of 50%. “They need help, too.”

“The villages are dead, the 1-2 cities of the area receive everything, we only get thrown a little public employment.” “I’ll wait till the end of this year, and then I think we’ll go bankrupt. I won’t force it if it’s not going.” “It’s a terrible mental-emotional burden if something doesn’t work out, if you cannot give anything to the people.”





Passing on the message

Under the shady trees of the garden there are a few men, not that young any more, covered in tattoos and a little embarrassed when greeting me, and there are also two social workers: this is the house of the Baptist Charity in Debrecen, where ex-drug users (recovering addicts) live for a few years as they recreate their connections with society. "Those who come here live here for a few years in full abstinence, attend meetings, and start a process of recovery. If they go back to their families, they are treated the same way there as before, when they were still active users" – Tibor Tókés, the manager of the house says. This place is not about rehabilitation, the residents are done with that; here they have to live the life of the "outside world", but in a protected environment.

Within the project which was supported by the NGO Fund, three of them visited underage offenders in the youth correctional centre of Debrecen regularly, with the aim of helping them start out on the path of abstinence. They certainly know how long that path is, they have gone through it themselves (or rather, they keep walking it throughout their lives). The purpose of the programme was letting them bring their knowledge, made authentic by their own lives, to those whose lives are already affected by drugs, but not completely

destroyed yet. Having been legally bound to go to the institution has of course significantly constrained their lives, but they still aren't at the stage where their experiential mentors used to be before starting out on a path of recovery.

The aim of the recoverees was to show them the 12-step Minnesota-model. "Those getting sober at our centre come from a variety of therapeutic backgrounds, and from the perspective of long-term sobriety, this one seemed the best" – Krisztina Marton, the other social worker says. So the mentor and the mentored support each other, and the therapeutic effect comes from one addict helping the other.

Name of organisation: **Szertelen Association**

Location: **Debrecen (Hajdú-Bihar county)**

Project title: **Beyond the walls**

Grant amount: **HUF 7 737 440**

Project duration: **12 months**

Project goals: Adapting the "Minnesota-model" for use in a correctional centre for underage offenders, which is a well-known and effective method for rebuilding one's personality and treating addicts. Throughout the 12-month therapeutic process, they ran two separate therapy groups for youth in pre-trial detention and those that already have a sentence.

<http://szertelen.hu/>

“Passing on the message, this is how the guys call the need to pass on what has helped them get out of the habit.” This practice is a lot more useful than having professionals, such as Tibor and the others try to convince the inmates to face their drug habit. Because one of the first steps is facing it, “admitting it”, as the Minnesota system calls it. Some of the young inmates are in pre-trial detention, while those that already have a sentence are permitted to leave the institution regularly, and they have drug-related issues – Krisztina and the others tell me –, although often they are not aware of it. “Drug use often plays a part in their criminal offences: either because the offender is totally high, or because of the lack of the drug.”

Of course Tibor and the others were also part of the team, they held extra workshops, but “experience is a lot more effective”. “It was a grassroots initiative, they visited them for half a year for free, and the inmates said good things about it. So we thought it would make sense to have people in recovery hold the workshops.”

The Minnesota-model is the programme used by Alcoholics Anonymous, AA and NA (Narcotics Anonymous).



Its essence is identification, the focus is on the people recovering and not the professionals, and the therapy takes place mainly at the meetings. “The taking down of the wall of denial also takes place in the group, which helps in



overcoming it. The process works in two directions: it has an effect on those sharing as well.” The recoverees visited the youth in the correction centre four times a week. The mentors participating in the programme have been sober for several years and have several years' recovery experience; one of them currently lives in England and the other one works as a truck driver in Debrecen. The host of the programme, the Correctional Centre of Debrecen was very

supportive, they gave them all the help they needed to make the tender successful – Krisztina and the others tell me.

The Szertelen Association has been operating since 2004, and they have done / do a wide range of things involving addicts. “The work we did in the correctional centre was more of the preventional kind. Adults have more discretion, people under 30 usually aren't able to quit yet. They need to experience a personal crisis that helps them face their addiction.”

“We have been accepted, we received positive feedback from the lads, they approached us happily later on, outside. The programme was designed so that they could recall what they heard inside and maybe start attending a group. They received the package, but I don't know when it will be activated” – Tibor says.

Krisztina tells me about one of their young people who told her that attending a meeting a few times “poisons” their drug use. “They start seeing themselves from the outside a little bit. Often it's not us who complete the work, but we contribute to it.”

Meanwhile, the heat recedes, the afternoon is nearly over, and the residents start to emerge from their rooms. One more day has passed without using. This is how it goes: one small step after the other.



Make it real

Irén Lázár will be taking the Szomolya Roma kids to the beach tomorrow: four kilometers walking through the forest, and back again. The kids love it, it's their vacation. Once a year, for a single day. That's all they can manage, the parents couldn't afford more than once a year. The association can't get their lunch for them, so they take their own, happy with their holiday all the same.

The community center is quiet: social administration during office hours, and a film club for young people three times a week. "Hungarians never come, though we advertise all our programs. When our kids went out trick or treating in the village for Halloween, they seemed to want to join in though," Irén tells us.

They bought the house in 2007, at the start of the eradication of the famous Szomolya cave dwellings. She had grown up in one, but moved away with her family. When the 23 families came down from the caves, anti-Roma sentiment in the village heightened. After a lapse, it is on the rise again. A third of Szomolya's 1600 residents are Roma, and only they attend the local school. In 2006, Irén was the first Roma to take her child to the next village school. Education is very important for her. Her own elementary school teacher refused to send her to middle school to graduate, instead she could study for a sales counter job and with her three kids is clawing her way up: she's earned a college degree. Her final goal is to become a teacher herself, and lead a school. "We must take our fate into our own hands," she says.

The organization's leader recalls their beginnings, "What are we getting ourselves into, we thought back then," she laughs. The organization numbers 17 people. "We always make it so they get something, a trip to the Parliament or whatever, but also ask for a contribution every time, only 4-500 forints as a token commitment."

This December they managed to secure food donations from a business in Debrecen – though usually, requests for this sort of in-kind support tend to go unanswered. "We seemed authentic enough to him. Some of the families we contacted with donations declined them, and asked that we

give them to poorer people, despite living in poverty themselves."

"Whenever I see a family make some progress, that is a great reward. Some are sweeping their yards, others are digging their veggie patches 6-8 years on. But a garden rake costs 3000 forints, a shovel costs 4; when they receive their 22 thousand forint aid, that's not what they'll invest in. Now they're renting our garden tools."

Their proposal to the Scholarship Fund was for aiding disadvantaged children. Their 10 mentors consult them every week: "They were basically surrogate mothers, and this was our most successful activity." Study was aided by tutors, for 5-8 students to a group. There was a stipend to the students as well, 2500 forints subject to their performance. No money was lost: all maluses were redeemable with subsequent improvement.

The third part of the program was providing community activities, in the form of fortnightly small group excursions. "We go out, hit the mall, drink some Coke. It's a big thing for them, they never get to do it. The poorest people are reluctant to even leave the village."

This is partly why the program includes social competence development among its goals, besides education aims. Four out of the five eighth graders on the program are moving on to middle school and eventual graduation. The program concluded in February, but tutoring work continued.

"5, 10 or 30 years from now, we will establish a school."

The house is bustling, 3 employees work as children and grown-ups keep coming. Social administrative work, dance classes, weekly disco sessions. "That is a staple, none of the bigger and better clubs let these people in. Every year we go camping, and last year in Fonyódliget the party tent was such a hit they didn't want to leave. They never saw a disco in their life, and just beelined for it, I hardly saw them anywhere else. So we decided to make a disco here in the enter: we got the lights to make it real, you just screw it in the light socket and watch it spin."

Name of organisation: **Szomolya Hungarian Roma Association**

Location: **Szomolya (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county)**

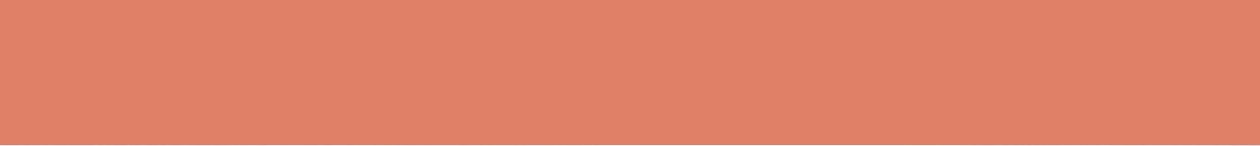
Project title: **Take my arm...**

Grant amount: **HUF 28 118 000**

Project duration: **25 months**

Project goals: Intense and dynamic intervention in the lives of 60 children and families in Sály and Szomolya to change their relation to learning and schooling. Prevention of their dropping out of school, development of their abilities and skills, providing personalized career counseling.

<http://www.szomolyairoma.hu/>






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