

Kazincbarcika, Hungary

The socially sensitive rehabilitation of Herbolya Old-Settlement in Kazincbarcika

The project targets a deprived, segregated area of the city with a high rate of unemployed, underprivileged families, among them Roma. The project has an integrated nature by combining hard and social infrastructure developments and establishing multi-sectoral services in the target area in order to tackle the complex problem of the local community. Building up a wide partnership and actively involving the local residents are proved to be main conditions to the success of the project.

The socially sensitive rehabilitation of Herbolya Old-Settlement in Kazincbarcika

The Herbolya Old-settlement project targeted a deprived, segregated area of a post-industrial city, Kazincbarcika situated in the most depressed region of Hungary. The project, which is still going on with the implementation of the social project elements, has a strong integrated nature by establishing hard and social infrastructure and bringing together multi-sectoral services to the target area, which were hardly accessible for the locals before. The integrated approach allowed for the opportunity to attain synergy effects of the services and thus to improve the empowerment and the integration of the local underprivileged community. The project is based on a broad partnership including public providers (social and health services) and a religious NGO rooted in the target area and providing originally vocational education for disadvantaged. There have been significant steps made toward a more participative approach related to the involvement of the local disadvantaged people but in this respect there is still a way to go. However the results achieved so far show that only projects that include the main stakeholders and the residents themselves can reach the wider circle of the community, especially the most marginalised ones. Regarding the sustainability of the project a main concern is the affordability of the maintenance costs of the increased housing quality as despite the training and employment programs there is no job to find. The sustainability issue also arises on the side of service providers both public and non-governmental as because of the economic crisis the maintenance of the established infrastructure and services means a more considerable burden than it was expected in the planning period. Nevertheless a key player of the project is the NGO – the Don Bosco School – which can bring substantial external resources in order to finance the services on the long run.

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Strong demand for regeneration

Kazincbarcika is a middle sized city (at least in Hungarian terms)¹ with 31 000 inhabitants situated in the most depressed region of Hungary, the North Hungarian region. The city was established from two smaller settlements and was developed from the 1950's as a socialist industrial city with mining and chemical industries. As such, it went through a deep crisis after the change of the regime when the mines and heavy industry factories were closed down. This change in the economy proved to have a long lasting effect on the local society as high unemployment rate, long-term unemployment and social marginalisation of the most vulnerable has persisted to maintain since the early nineties despite that the chemical industry has been partly preserved and modernised and some other part of the local economy has been developed. The development of the city is also hindered by the fact that region where it is located has been experiencing a more severe economic decline and even the regional centre, Miskolc struggling with the structural adjustment to the new circumstances.

These unfavourable economic and social developments have had consequences such as deteriorating urban environment concerning even the city centre and the surrounding residential area consisting mainly of prefabricated buildings of the socialist era and increasing spatial segregation of marginalised social groups. Such problems together with the need for development of the local economy appeared as main challenges that the city had to face by the mid-2000 when the EU resources became available on a larger scale for urban development. Consequently in its Integrated Urban Development Strategy (IUDS) prepared in 2008 the regeneration of the problematic urban areas was defined as a main aim in order to increase the attractiveness of the city. The city designated three main action areas of very different types: the city centre, a low status prefabricated housing estate and segregated area, called Herbolya. The city prepared project proposals and successfully applied for urban rehabilitation funds in the framework of the Regional Operational Programme for all the three projects. In the case of the housing estate and the segregated area Kazincbarcika has implemented the so called socially sensitive urban rehabilitation programme, which was designed by the National Development Agency in order to give complex answers for socially and physically deprived urban areas. Such preference to socially sensitive rehabilitation projects was very rare, as most cities favoured the so called city-centre rehabilitation first. This article shows the project aiming the regeneration of Herbolya, which is one the largest and most problematic deprived area of the city. The project – despite some of its shortcomings - seen as a good practice in terms of contributing to halt the downward spiral of segregation of the area.

Deteriorating urban structure and development goals in Herbolya

Herbolya is a deprived area of Kazincbarcika, situated on the outskirts of the city. The exact target area consists of only a part of the Herbolya, the so called Old-Settlement, but some other surrounding smaller deprived areas have also been attached to the target area. This part of the city, including the Old-Settlement, originally was developed as a residential area

¹ In Hungary cities considered big over 50 thousand inhabitants, while cities of 20-50 thousand inhabitants are middle sized cities.

for miners, being isolated from the main part of the city at the time of construction. Since then the growing family house area reached Herbolya. Herbolya and its surroundings lacked the basic infrastructure services such as rain water drainage and covered roads, water was accessible only from street taps for most of the households and no sewage system was in place. The local housing stock is characterised by substandard one-storey row or single houses which were mainly in municipal ownership but were privatised at the beginning of the nineties. The social decline of the area started after the change of the regime in 1989, when the mines were closed and those who could afford left the area. Their houses were bought by low status people who were crowded out from housing of higher comfort level because of the sharply increasing maintenance costs. The area became inhabited by those elderly people who could not leave and those mainly marginalised, many of them Roma who could not afford to live elsewhere. As a result of this change of social composition the physical condition of buildings and the area also started to decline. There are some statistics presented just to show the scale of the problem: out of the 707 people living in the area in 2008 at least 35% of Roma origin, 25% is less than 14 years old, more than 50 % is unemployed, while 80% of the houses has no piped water supply. In addition, there are families with more than three children and also several generations often live together resulting in overcrowded housing situation. An indicator of the affordability problem of even this substandard housing is that in quite many household the electricity was cut-off. Another major problem is that because of the peripheral location the public services are hardly accessible from the territory. There is public transportation to the city-centre but for the most disadvantaged ones it is hardly affordable.

Despite all these negative trends Herbolya has a high importance for the city as it is situated in a naturally beautiful green area, next to two small lakes and a forest, which used to be the main recreational area for the city residents. A cultural facility, the former miners' cultural house is also located in Herbolya, but was abandoned in the last few years. Another value of the area is that the city can grow only this direction as from other directions it is surrounded by natural or artificial barriers (mountains, roads, railways).



One of the lake and the surrounding hills at Herbolya

The municipality has been committed to regenerate Herbolya thus they started to develop the project at the beginning of 2008, when the first call for urban rehabilitation projects was issued. The main goal of the project has been to reintegrate Herbolya both in social and spatial sense into the city by improving the life circumstances of the local marginalised people, increasing their social status and their social inclusion. There has been a special focus on young people in order to prevent as much as possible the reproduction of marginalised situations.

The initial project proposal was accepted at the end of 2008, and it took one and a half year more to develop the final proposal (as it is a two-round application process). The contract was signed in February 2011, and terminates by the end of 2012 but very probably will be prolonged by two months. By the spring of 2012, all the physical investments were finished and the social measures were started already.

An integrated, multi-sectoral approach

In order to tackle the complex set of physical and social problems of Herbolya the project used an integrated, multi-sectoral approach combining hard and soft measures. Such approach demanded a wide partnership building as it was necessary to include those municipal, state and non-governmental stakeholders who would deliver the services for the local people. Furthermore the participation of the locals in a more active way was planned as reaching a wide circle of the local people among them the most marginalised with the services and ensuring the sustainability of the investments were considered as major risks from the beginning.

The hard and soft measures of the project have been strongly built on each other. The physical investments are of two types: on one hand they intend to improve the direct living conditions of the families, on the other hand they provide new facilities for the social measures. The first type covers the development of water and sewage utilities and paving the road with asphalt and establishing rainwater drainage in the Old-settlement. Such investments have created the possibility for the households to improve the comfort level of their housing. It was important also because the housing improvement interventions are compulsory elements of the socially sensitive rehabilitation programme but only condominiums and social housing are eligible for EU support according to the regulation and not private single or row houses. As the settlement consists of the latter type of housing, the refurbishment of the buildings themselves was not possible. However many of the households are not able to cover the costs of the connection to the newly developed utilities and thus the municipality promised to support such costs from its own budget.



The dilapidated housing in Herbolya



Some private renewal of the houses

The second type of actions consists of the renewal of the existing but unused community house (it used to be the miners' cultural centre), the transformation of the former also unused teacher building to local family care centre, and building a new vocational training centre. In addition a sport court and outdoor stage were built in the court of the community house and a playground was realised at the family care centre in order to provide facilities for outdoor community activities.

The soft measures are aimed at tackling the major social problems of the neighbourhood by increasing the accessibility of basic social and health services and putting in place new, additional services. The local family care centre, which is operated by the municipal Social Service Centre of Kazincbarcika, provides social services for the family by two experienced social workers, one dealing with child welfare service, the other with the social benefit issues and family consultancy. A laundry and a shower room are built in the family care centre to help the people who do not have water in their house or have difficulties to cover the utility fees. They also operate a so called "Let's play together" program where parents with their smaller kids (up to 10 years old) can go to, and another program is providing early childhood development service which is very much needed for children coming from underprivileged families. In the family care centre three local people work as social assistants. A part of the building was given to the civic patrol service organisation that established a Herbolya neighbourhood branch as the crime prevention element of the project. They involved also local Roma people in the patrol service.



The Family Care Centre



The laundry room in it

The community house and the vocational training centre are run by the Don Bosco Elementary, Vocational and High School. In the community house the activities focus on the bigger children and young people offering extra-curriculum measures helping children to do their homework and providing every day creative and sport facilities. The vocational training centre primarily aims to provide adults qualifications which meet demands on the labour market. In the framework of the employment program six social assistants from local people were trained and are employed in the family care and community centres helping the implementations of the social project elements and to communicate with the parents. Furthermore another local person with diploma was trained to provide assistance in job searching by leading the so called employment information point. This information point works together with the regional unemployment office in order to co-ordinate the training programs of the two organisations and to make more efficient the job searching of the unemployed. Also in the framework of the project 27 adults are trained as welder and mason, which are of short supply in the regional labour market. In the building of the vocational training centre consultation rooms are created for the district family doctor and child health nurse services thus bringing closer to the people these important health services.

The employment of local people in the services newly placed in Herbolya has a great importance from several aspects. These local people become committed to the project and help the service providers to reach the local residents, among them the most marginalised and attract them to use the services. In addition to those who work in service provision 10 people were employed in the implementation of infrastructure investment. According to the municipality this has had a major role in that no damage has been made so far in the new

structures, such as the playground, laundry room etc, which was perceived as major risk of the project.



The community house

The vocational training centre with playground

Governance of partnership and participation is a main challenge

The project owner and the main initiator of the project has been the municipality and it has had a major role in forming the partnership. The consortium partners of the municipality are the municipal Social Service Centre of Kazincbarcika, the Don Bosco Elementary, Vocational and High School and the city's Civic Security Patrol Service. These three consortium partners receive funds in the frame of the project in order to operate the social measures. In the selection of the partners the municipality considered the aspect of sustainability: they wanted to choose such partners that stay in the target area on longer run after the project closure. To operate the local family care centre in Herbolya, the municipal Social Service Centre seemed to be a natural choice, also because the level of social services for the families of Herbolya was not sufficient. The Don Bosco school was also a quite obvious option to involve in the project as it operates the school for disadvantaged children since 1993 and in the first ten years the school was located in Herbolya, so the Don Bosco is well rooted in the action area. It also has had an every-day connection with the local families as many adolescent from Herbolya attend the school.

In addition, the so called cooperating partners also have been involved in the partnership: the regional unemployment office, the health nurse service for children, the family doctor service and the Roma Minority Self-government of Kazincbarcika. These partners have not received additional resources for their activities but draw in additional capacity by intensifying their services to the target area.

Though the project owner is the municipality and it is the main leader of the partnership the project management and thus partly the steering of the partnership has been contracted out to an external consultant company, COWI Hungary. The main reason for that was that the municipality did not have enough capacity to manage a project of such a big size and also the related experiences was missing to develop integrated projects. The consultant company had worked with the municipality in several other projects before and it was the one that elaborated the IUDS of the city thus had a profound knowledge about the city.

Despite the broad and multi-sectoral partnership the governance of partnership has substantial weaknesses which have appeared in the planning and implementation processes as well. A main deficiency has been the insufficient level of cooperation with the partners. The partnership was operated rather in the form of a consultant group which could not efficiently channel the interests and the needs of the partners into the project leadership. On

the side of the municipality the planning phase had rather a technical approach and there was no social expert who was responsible for the development of the social measures. This arrangement had consequences on the physical investments as well, e.g. originally no ventilation system has been planned in the workshop room of the training centre, which means a delay in launching its operation. Another important example is that the counselling room provided for the child health nurse service was not agreed on with the nurses and therefore could not be put into family care service, which could increase the efficiency of both service providers.

However, not only the stronger cooperation between the program management and the partners is a main gap but also the cooperation between the main partners, local family care service and the Don Bosco, seems to be not efficient enough. The two partners have a kind of practical every-day relation consulting mainly in individual problems of certain families but the approach of strategic cooperation is lacking. As a result no real community social work is carried out, the social measures remains on the level of managing local people's individual problems. This relates to the problem that on the one hand the local family care service does not have its own professional leadership but it is rather an operational unit of the municipal Social Service Centre, on the other hand the project itself is lacking professional leadership in the field of social measures and community involvement.



The storage buildings in the backyard-partly demolished



Event in the community house

The shortcomings of participative approach are derived from the weak community involvement in the planning and implementation phase. This is true despite the already mentioned positive results of directly employing people in the implementation of the project. This has been manifested in the uncertainty on the part of the local families about the implementation of two project elements which have great importance for them: the municipal financial support to households to connect to the water and system, and the demolition of the dilapidated storage buildings in the backyard of the houses. Two residential forums were held in the planning phase in 2009 discussing the needs and the planned project elements and also the willingness to connect to the water and sewage utilities was assessed. In these forums the municipality and the residents agreed on that the municipality give financial support for households' connection and that it organises the transport of demolished storage buildings if the residents are complete the demolition by themselves. Nevertheless there has not been any advancement since then in either issue, though the municipal assembly has approved a decision related to the financial support. A main reason for this is that none of the stakeholders were appointed to organise the related community actions: neither the demolition of the structures nor the preparation for connecting people to the utility system.

This highlights the lack of generating and steering community activities and weak communication toward the local inhabitants, which can destroy the trust toward the project.

Can services be maintained on the long-run?

A main aim of the project has been to channel sufficient scale of services to the target area in order to promote the integration of the local disadvantaged community. The partnership design has also considered that such a partner should be involved who is able to cover a part of the costs of sustained services after the project closure. According to the regulation the investments funded with EU support have to be maintained with the same functions at least for five years and the same is applied to the related social measures. The municipality has taken upon the responsibility to finance the local family care services for five years with the same level of employment. However a major part of the social measures will be sustained by the Don Bosco school. The organisation is in a favourable situation as it can rely on several types of funding: the Salesian Order (which the Don Bosco belongs to) provides additional resources for several activities, the financing of vocational trainings comes from the central government or EU funds and the municipality will contribute the yearly operational cost of the community house with 4.5 million HUF in exchange the Don Bosco equips the community and the training centres. In addition the Don Bosco regularly applies for EU funds and also has some revenue from some complementary activities. Nevertheless both the municipality and the Don Bosco are influenced negatively by the financial crisis. The municipality has taken out loans to cover its own share for several large EU supported projects and the payment burden of such loans has increased substantially. It also receives less financial contributions from the state government partly because the restructuring the competences of public services. This latter applies to the Don Bosco school as well, as the state contribution to finance vocational education has decreased. Such developments can result in financial difficulties to operate the services on the same level.

Another sensitive issue appears on the side of the households regarding the covering the newly developed utility fees. Even if the households are enabled to connect to the network with the support of the Municipality, their ability to pay the fees is considerably limited. The affordability of housing maintenance has been a critical issue in the deprived area reflected in the fact that quite many households were disconnected from electricity. This affordability problem has even worsened because of the effects of economic crisis appearing in the even further shrinking labour market and the decreasing social benefits.

Key measures for real effects

Article 8 promotes the participative, integrated and sustainable approach to urban development which has been a main objective of the design of the socially sensitive rehabilitation programme in the framework of regional operational programmes. Although the conditions of the integrated and participative approach were defined by the call it is the merit of the municipality to exploit the potentials of such requirements.

The main strength of the project lies in its integrated nature, that it has combined hard and soft measures together in such a way that they can have synergy effect on the longer run. Both kinds of measures are of multi-sectoral nature. Hard investments improved local people's life-quality, established social infrastructure in order to put in place those social, educational, employment etc. services that can contribute to the empowerment and social inclusion of the local marginalised people. Direct housing investments were not possible

because of the tenure ship form of the local housing stock but the development of the public utilities has created the possibility to increase the comfort level of housing.

As a part of the project a wide partnerships has been built up involving public and non-governmental organisations who deliver the most important services from the aspect of social inclusion. The local residents actively participated in the implementation of the project as they were employed in the construction and the service delivery elements. This active involvement helps to accept the project goals and activities by the local community and helps the higher use of the newly established services and a better preserving of the new investments. The sustainability was also taken into account as such partners were chosen that stays in the action area on the long-run and can finance at least partly the established services.

It should be noted that the Herbolya project is still ongoing thus there is still time to overcome of the problems. A final say on the project can be made only after the project foreclosure. Nevertheless there are some shortcomings of the project appearing at this stage which can provide important conclusions for other similar projects.

No matter how wide the partnership is in the project but if there is not enough coordination between the partners and the needs of the partners are not taken into account then the different kinds of services will not reach the desired synergy effect and can lead overlapping provisions. Therefore it is important to employ a social expert in the management who understands the needs of deprived communities and can assess the needed actions and capacities that should be placed into the target area.

The Herbolya case also shows that the active involvement of the local people is important from the very beginning of the project planning and then through the implementation as well. Such participative approach can bring only the suitable solutions to problematic issues and create the commitment of the locals toward the project. Such residential involvement has an important community building effect, which is a main condition to empowerment of marginalised people, and also to the sustainability of some of the project elements. It could also lead to the self-organisation of the locals in order to implement some actions together.

Sustainability is also a main issue to consider. The EU funds bring cheap resources for developing hard and social infrastructure but often the costs of operation are not considered carefully enough. It should be avoided to put too much hard infrastructure in place instead some basic services should be established which can ensure the social inclusion of the marginalised on the long run.

An important but more general conclusion of the project is that it can be of integrated nature with highly participative approach but if it is situated in an economically deeply depressed area such as Kazincbarcika then basic social situation of households such as unemployment and the very low income level, hardly can be changed in the framework of the project. Thus there are very limited possibilities to improve the living and housing conditions as the increased housing costs cannot be financed by the households and neither the municipality nor the central government can provide such an amount of social benefits which would make affordable the better housing conditions. This calls the attention to the importance to link the regeneration of deprived areas with broader economic development of a region and also with such national sectoral policies as housing allowance and social benefit systems.

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