Rebuilding Local Communities and Social Capital in Hungary

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Although the term 'non-profit' has only been used in relation to organisations since the middle of the 20th century, societal institutions conducting 'non-profit' activities have existed as long as human communities.[1] Throughout history, interest in and concern for 'community' have been conveyed to individuals through religious commands, social norms and state edicts, although with differing levels of coerciveness and with variable degrees of charitable voluntary action. The following will outline some milestones and tendencies in the development of the Hungarian civic sector.

Forebears of civil society and first examples of cooperation between the state and the civic sector in Hungary date back to the Middle Ages and the founding of the first independent state. Early examples of foundations can be seen in the actions of Prince Géza and King Stephan, who confiscated lands from heathen rebel leaders and donated them to the Catholic Church, thus providing resources for the establishment of religious orders.[2] The monarch was not allowed to rescind the resources provided, but could partly determine the purposes for which they could be used, as is also the case of modern foundations.

Until the late 20th century, however, Hungary experienced only short periods of political independence, the result of wars or revolts that typically ended in suppression and occupation. Under these conditions, little scope existed for voluntary citizen initiative. By contrast, strategies and techniques for resistance and survival developed in society, and remain embedded in the collective memory. These continue to shape community responses, even to modern challenges, and have an impact on the behaviour of non-profit organisations today.

Hungary's political, social and civic development has been extensively determined by its experience of invasion by the Turks in the late 15th century, and by foreign colonisation in

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[1] This section is mainly based, with her permission, on the work of Éva Kuti, especially Kuti, É., *Hívjuk talán non-profitnak* [Let's Call It NGO], Nonprofit kutatások no. 7 (Budapest: Non-profit Research Group, 1998); and Kuti, É., *Civil Europe - Civil Hungary* (Budapest: European House, 2008).

[2] Kecskés, L., "Az alapítványi jog fejlődése" [The Development of the Legislation on Foundations], *Magyar Jog*, no 2 (1988), pp. 110-111.

the Habsburg Monarchy. Especially the policies of the latter hindered the development of bourgeois values. Prolonged feudalism and the delayed development of the bourgeoisie rendered the self-organisation of society difficult, and emergent 'voluntary' movements in the late 18th and early 19th century became clearly oppositional. An example are the reading circles created in the 1790's which were, to all intents and purposes, "... political associations regarding reading and culture as tools of social transformation and of the fight against the Austrian colonisation".[3] Several of its leaders were executed, the reading circles banned, and public libraries closed.[4] When some libraries were reopened, a special imperial decree was issued prohibiting "... that the libraries be connected to a public reading room or a scientific association".[5] The flourishing of associations was an organic element of the reform movement of the 19th century. Hence, after the 1848 revolution, the court in Vienna made great efforts to ban or at least to paralyse associations. Before the Austrian-Hungarian compromise of 1867, only 319 associations were registered. After the compromise their number increased gradually.[6]

With the advent of the 20th century, people from specific social strata began to associate and organise. Besides building an identity as a group and organising cultural and leisure activities for their members, such associations also performed advocacy functions, including the representation of workers' interests. In addition to the earlier associations of nobles, intellectuals and burgers, workers, craftsmen and peasants also formed their organisations. Many of these addressed social challenges, especially workers' associations and those of an explicit political nature. Despite conflicts with the authorities, repeated bans and excessive administrative requirements, the number and scope of voluntary associations continued to grow.

Hence, by the interwar period, 'associating' could already be considered a mass phenomenon. In 1932, there were 14,365 registered associations in Hungary, of which 12.6 per cent operated in the fields of culture and religion, 6.6 per cent in sports, 32.6 per cent in leisure activities, 0.7 per cent in education and science, 19.8 per cent in health and welfare, 9.3 per cent in fire brigades, 16.4 per cent in trade and 2 per cent in other fields.[7]

In parallel, the early 20th century witnessed the emergence of a strong foundation sector. Less politically explosive than voluntary associations, foundation activities were mainly of a

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[3] Fülöp, G., *A magyar olvasóközönség a felvilágosodás idején és a reformkorban* [The Hungarian Reading Public during the Enlightenment and the Reform Age] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), p. 33.

[4] Kósa, J., *A magyar kölcsönkönyvtárak kezdetei* [The Beginnings of Hungarian Public Libraries] (Budapest: Magyar Könyvszemle, 1939), p. 463; Kulcsár, A., *Olvasóközönségünk 1800 táján* [Our Reading Public Around 1800] (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1943), p. 29.

[5] Gárdonyi, A., *Régi pesti könyvkereskedők* [Book Traders of Old Pest] (Budapest: Stephaneum Nyomda, 1930), p. 85

[6] Kuti, É., *Statistics of Foundations and Associations* (Budapest: Central Statistics Office, 1994), p 83.

[7] Ibid.

charitable nature. Foundations usually specialised in initiating, supporting and financing the development of welfare services, often in tandem with state authorities. A great deal of foundation support and many private donations and bequests went to public education and social care. There were 'foundation beds' in public hospitals, 'foundation places' in public orphanages, shelters, nursing homes, schools, and universities. Government often contributed, financially or in kind, to the establishment of private charities. Voluntary organisations and foundations may not have been dominant in service provision but made important contributions in terms of quality and innovation. In health and education, associations and foundations 'pioneered' institutions, such as the first kindergartens and hospitals. Their role was not only charitable, as they made explicit social needs and acted as policy advocates. Frequently, voluntary organisations persuaded state authorities to provide social services when philanthropic sources proved to be insufficient.

With the beginning of World War II and the subsequent Communist takeover, this development was interrupted for several decades. Communist governments considered individuals as potentially hostile and as needing re-education as socialists. They feared that social movements might fall outside party control. In keeping with this, almost all voluntary organisations in Hungary were banned in the early 1950s. What remained of the voluntary sector was nationalised and brought under state control. A series of administrative rules prevented citizens from establishing new independent voluntary associations, while the government artificially created 'mass organisations' which worked under strict party control. The 1956 revolution revealed the depth of the gap that had emerged between state and society in Hungary – the government understood that crude oppression would not work in Hungary as a means of governance and citizens learned from the failure of the revolution that more subtle approaches to resistance were necessary. This created a curious atmosphere of distrust. Citizens formed voluntary organisations, which they pretended were politically neutral, when in fact their nature was oppositional. Their very existence represented society's hostility towards the dictatorship and its desire for even limited autonomy, and whenever the political climate became milder, these organisations took every opportunity to carve out a little more freedom.

Heit and Vidra Szabó point out that in the 1970s and 1980s, the creation of local (mostly cultural and leisure) associations was motivated by a wider array of issues than interest in culture and leisure.[8] Through such organisations, people living in villages often tried to address problems caused by local community policy dictated by the central government, and deficiencies in services and institutions. They used these associations as platforms for their advocacy actions. Citizens were further motivated to associate because this allowed

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[8] Heit, G., and Vidra Szabó, F., "A kulturális egyesületek és szabadidős társaságok szerepe a helyi társadalom fejlődésében" [The Role of Cultural Associations and Leisure Clubs in the Development of Local Societies], in: Kuti, É. (ed.), *A non-profit szektor Magyarországon* [The Non-Profit Sector in Hungary] (Budapest: Non-profit Research Group, 1992), pp. 198-201.

them to experience independence and autonomy, gave them the possibility to engage with different values, and the opportunity to be part of an honest exchange of opinions.

The 1980s saw a gradual broadening of the scope of associative activity. While the state still had the legal authority to do so, it did not dare to crack down on citizens' initiatives. State socialism came to be considered in crisis, as it clearly failed to deliver on its promises. A comprehensive system of public institutions providing every citizen with the whole range of high quality public services free of charge was simply too costly. The state was forced to accept that alternative methods of financing were needed, and by the mid-1980s, state authorities admitted that structural reform was inevitable. Thus, by the time the Iron Curtain was raised and fundamental political change became feasible, the Hungarian government had already begun to admit that it needed the assistance of both for-profit and non-profit organisations to solve social problems.

In 1989, there were 8,296 associations and 400 foundations in Hungary.[9] In fact, the 'rehabilitation' of foundations preceded political change, as legal provisions pertaining to foundations reappeared in the Civil Code as early as 1987. Moreover, the Parliament passed a law on association in 1989 that established legal guarantees for the freedom of association. In other words, the development of civil society was not an outcome of political change in Hungary. Rather, civic organisations played an active role in preparing political transformation.

The regulatory framework for civil society evolved further throughout the 1990s and 2000s. There were two milestones in this process. The first was the 1997 law on the 1 per cent system. The second was the 2004 law on the creation of the National Civic Fund. Both acts delegated some government decision-making to private actors. They authorised taxpayers and elected civil society representatives to distribute a limited part of the state budget to non-profit organisations. Thus, the 1 per cent system and the National Civic Fund enabled non-profit organisations to get public support through intensive civic participation, in accordance with civic priorities and without endangering their independence from the state.

The legal and economic regulations enacted since 1989 have created a broad institutional framework and favourable, although not ideal, conditions for the development of civil initiatives and non-profit service provision in Hungary. Statistical data available demonstrates that this framework is appreciated by actors of civil society and has encouraged them to continue their development and work, resulting in the impressive

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[9] These associations engaged in culture and religion (3.9 per cent), sports (36.3 per cent), leisure (23.8 per cent), education and science (1.6 per cent), health and welfare (6.7 per cent), fire service (13.9 per cent), trade (7.6 per cent), and other activities 6.2 per cent); see Kuti, É., *Statistics of Foundations and Associations* (Budapest: Central Statistics Office, 1994), p. 83.

growth of the civic sector. The number of non-profit organisations has grown by a factor of nine since 1989, exceeding 72,860 in 2009.[10] Growth was particularly rapid in the early 1990s. Since 1995, it has not only slowed down but has become more differentiated. Non-profit organisations engaged in health care, education and research, economic development, human rights, and social care are characterised by dynamic and steady growth. Culture, environment, sports and recreation, international relations, and non-profit federations demonstrate slowing growth, while economic and professional advocacy organisations and voluntary fire brigades demonstrate stagnation and even decline.

In Hungary today one can observe varied relationships between the state and non-profit organisations, and a dynamic flow of benefits. These include support to the actions of government from the civic sector, through which non-profit organisations engage in fundraising and provide support to public institutions in health or education. Through dialogue and exchange of information, government receives clues as to the needs and concerns of citizens. Joint bids for tenders give local and other government authorities access European Union funds that would otherwise not be available to either government or non-profit organisations. The contracting out of services can help the government to ensure effective service delivery without extensive bureaucracy. Legal and economic regulation of the non-profit sector is important, as the state can create an enabling or hindering environment for the civic sector and its work. Social participation and control are important, as the civic sector represents interests and demands of society towards government, or else acts as a transmission belt for the state towards society.

Government relations with civil society have been regulated by a variety of acts, programmes and strategies. Of these, the most important have been the government's civil society strategy 2002-2006, and the government resolution on planned measures 2006-2010, both of which can be considered to have been implemented. The implementation of these programmes has demonstrated that efforts to develop partnership between government and the civic sector have been considerable. Since 2002, the government's intentions and objectives have also been documented and discussed with the representatives of civil society. While not all objectives have been fully achieved, and some aims have had to be temporarily or definitively given up, the emergence of strategic thinking about government-non-profit partnerships is an important development.

This overview of the historical development of civil society in Hungary demonstrates that some progress towards the consolidation of democracy has been made since 1989. Current political developments in Hungary, however, are cause for much concern. In April 2010, a

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[10] Nagy, R., and Sebestyén, I., *Statistics of Non-profit Organisations 2009* (Budapest: Central Statistics Office, 2011) surveyed 72,860 non-profit organisations in 2009, of which 66,145 were active. 9 per cent of the organisations had ceased, suspended or not started their operations, most of them associations. Voluntary fire brigades closed down most often (16 per cent), followed by professional and economic advocacy groups and those engaged politics (10 per cent). By contrast, the educational sector appeared to be most stable.

'national conservative' government won a two-thirds majority, after a populist election campaign that was reminiscent of the promises made by state socialism. The key element of the new government's politics is a critique of the previous socialist-liberal coalition government and its programme consists largely of reversing measures passed by that government. As a result of its large majority, the new government has extensively changed legislation and eliminated many of the checks and balances established in Hungary's transition to democracy. This has not gone unnoticed by the civic sector, which has been subjected to measures based on mistrust and suspicion. The possibilities for citizen participation and the involvement of civic actors in decision-making have been extensively curtailed, and relations between the non-profit sector and the state are fundamentally changed. New legislation on civil society is under consideration and is likely to be adopted at the end of 2011. Although it remains unclear how this legislation will affect the functioning and development of civil society, many are seriously frustrated.

Those committed to democracy are deeply concerned about the current government's efforts to centralise decision-making and strengthen the power of the state, and its concomitant moves to weaken free media and human, political and social rights. The contemporary discourse is characterised by recourse to nationalism, populism and Hungary's past. While resistance to this government's approach is very likely to grow, it is also likely to be very difficult for ordinary people to differentiate between reality and manipulation as a result of the lack of long-term democratic tradition and people's desire for security and safety. This clearly shows how fragile Hungary's new democracy remains, and the extent to which there is a danger of regression.

Adding to the described evolution of civil society is the very specific meaning and reality of 'community' in post-Soviet and post-communist societies, such as Hungary.[11] The failure of the 'great socialist experiment' has done great harm to the credibility of community ideals. Citizens in these societies are deeply suspicious of anything termed 'communal', which became a synonym for 'socialist' as opposed to 'individualistic' or 'bourgeois'. The elimination of all opportunities for self-determination slowly smothered the ability of people to self-organise. Instead, ideological retraining, sham optimism, and a discourse of slogans created a very negative community experience for the majority of people. They gradually withdrew into the private sphere, the only area of life in which people believed they had scope for autonomous decision-making. Research conducted in the early 1980s points to the fact that Hungarian society was more 'individualistic' and lacked a sense of community more than other societies, including that of the United States.[12]

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[11] Verbseg, I., Közösség: *Eszme és valóság* [Community: Ideal and Reality] (Budapest: Közösségfejlesztők Egyesülete, 1993); see also, for an English version, Deller, U., and Brake, R. (eds.), *Community Development – A European Challenge* (Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2008), pp. 284-298.

[12] Hankiss, E., Manchin, R., Füstös, L., and Szakolczay, Á., *Folytonosság és szakadás. A magyar társadalom értékrendjének leírása egy országos értékszociológiai vizsgálat alapján* [Continuity and Rupture. Description of

During the Soviet era, 'community' was defined as a 'quality group' tasked with carrying out the social objectives set by the political elite. Those objectives were determined by a mixture of ideology and social psychology, but the underlying conceptual idea behind the notion of community in the context of state socialism was never made explicit to people, who also had no role to play in the determination of social objectives. In the state socialist centralised and hierarchical system it was not possible to speak about the self-organisation of citizens, even though this is both the original and contemporary sense of the concept of community. Similarly to English, the Hungarian meaning of community includes being bound to both a locality and to a group of people. Today, Hungarian community development professionals usually interpret community as being rooted in a given locality. Taking a functional approach, a community exists to help its members in the most important areas of life: socialisation, economic welfare, social inclusion, social control and mutual support.

The concept of locality, or neighbourhood, which is commonly associated with community, should be considered separately. The concept of neighbourhood is primarily an urban concept. Neighbourhoods are supposed to be functional communities, systems of contacts based on mutual help, and their importance increases as a result of certain social phenomena, such as unemployment, demography and political changes.

The potential for development that is represented by communities has spurred extensive interest in the phenomenon of social capital, and it has placed the issues of trust and cooperation firmly on the public agenda. When a government is faced with the challenge of divided communities and of neighbourhoods virtually destroyed by violence, threatening behaviour and high levels of crime and drug abuse, finding ways of re-injecting social capital becomes a vitally important goal. Thus community becomes an essential part of the policy agenda as well as being at the core of civil society and community development.[13]

Case study I: Participative learning for rural communities in Northern Hungary

This case study presents how community participation, knowledge about local citizen participation and citizen self-organisation were enhanced, and the institutions of local citizen action established, through community development and adult education in five

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the Scale of Values in the Hungarian Society Based on a National Value Sociology Survey] (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Science, Institute for Sociology, 1982).

[13] Henderson, P., and Vercseg, I., *Community development and civil society. Making connections in the European context* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2010), p. 22.

small regions of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, a severely disadvantaged county on the northern periphery of Hungary between 2005 and 2011.[14]

Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County is the second largest in the country, and borders on Slovakia and Ukraine. Its total population is 709,634, with 408,000 people living in urban areas. There are 358 local communities in the county, of which 25 are towns. 34 per cent of the local communities have populations under 500 persons. The standard of living in the villages is lower than that in the towns. The villages have less access to services, job opportunities, healthcare and care for the aged, as well as to public institutions. As for infrastructural development, running water, electricity, telephones and gas are available almost everywhere, but sewerage is missing in several places. Transport is excellent between Budapest and Miskolc, the county capital, by rail and highway. This said the availability of transportation to the small villages is variable.

The 1990s saw the county facing the consequences of economic transformation. The sudden collapse of heavy industry, such as metallurgy, mines and chemical plants, led to a structural crisis that caused high unemployment, the migration of qualified labour away from the county, the depopulation of whole villages, the ageing of the population, the withdrawal of public institutions and ghettoization. While the county caught up somewhat after 2003, the most recent economic crisis halted this development and further jobs have been lost since 2007. As a result, the villages lack services and public institutions, especially in the fields of health, education and culture. Postal services and locations for citizens to meet and exchange are also lacking.

The 'Common Knowledge' participatory learning programme was carried out in five micro-regions including 85 local communities, mostly villages, in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. Starting in 2009, the programme was based on the assumption that the county's economic development could be influenced by community and social relations, as well as by active citizen participation in public issues. The programme built on the creativity, knowledge, self-organisation and cooperation skills of the locals, and it reached beyond local community limits, made training widely accessible and generated new cooperation.

The programme set out to improve the quality of locals' lives through participative learning processes, through formal and informal adult education. In local contexts, the transition to a democratic culture has been slower than the economic transition. Some of the social skills previously required have become obsolete, while those required by democracy have not yet been acquired. Until the community development process took place in these localities, the

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[14] This section is based on the work of Gyula Bakó, Béla Bereczky, Erzsébet Budai, Ferenc Dolgos, Gábor Erdei, Katalin H. Petkovics, Pál Hadobás, Kitti Kovács, Zsuzsa Mészáros, Aranka Molnár, Éva Olter, Andrea Sélley, Póta Mária Lázár, Géza Széki, László Tiszolczki, Anna Mária Tóth and Klára Tünde Ureczky.

citizens did not believe that they could act to improve their own situation. As a result, they were not motivated to act or to learn, and were shy and afraid of new things. The intervention of community developers grew new institutions of citizen participation that helped residents to see the value of civic engagement. The programme also increased the capacity of existing institutions for community organising and adult education (mostly cultural institutions, often at the forefront of Hungarian community development work).

In almost all rural areas in Hungary, learning for democracy and skills relevant to the contemporary economic and social context are deficient. Little has been done to provide free access to learning opportunities for rural residents, who are faced with having to transform their lives and communities. Apart from the local pedagogical institute or the organisation that re-trains unemployed people, there are almost no adult education institutions operating in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. Employers provide some training but focus on skills for specific jobs, rather than addressing life or community building skills. The most popular courses taken are driving lessons and language courses. Local cultural centres have not been able to seize the opportunity and specialise in adult education, due to a lack of supportive policies and financial resources.

The programme aimed to address some of these deficits, especially those related to education and community development. Although community development cannot solve structural unemployment, it can contribute to local economic development. One training element worked with community enterprises and local economic development, including trainings in community entrepreneurship, local guiding for hiking and culture, and community mentoring. Study circles were organised to compensate for the lack of opportunities for adult education. Another part of the programme focused on community capacity for self-help, aiming to motivate young people to stay in their communities, develop the sense of belonging, and strengthen mutual help and solidarity within the community and openness towards the outside world.

The idea of community development appeared in the county in 2001 when the Hungarian Association for Community Development (HACD) started a community development process in the micro-regions of Ózd and Putnok and in the villages of Királd and Hét. A few local professionals working in culture, NGOs or for social change took part in HACD's work and training activities, forming a core team that gradually worked towards the goals of community development. The county's Institute for Culture made community development an integral part of its work. Its members teamed up with like-minded professionals seeking community approaches to change and, in 2002, founded the Dialogue for Communities Association. These two key institutions cooperate with county cultural institutions and the institutions of higher education, especially as regards culture, social work and adult education. They engage these institutions in mobilising locals, conducting research and

training, and organising new services. Further cooperating partners are schools, family support and child protection services, institutions of healthcare and education, the business sector, churches, and the minority communities in the county. Above all, the programme sought to engage the residents of participating local communities.

Launched in July 2009 and completed in June 2011, the 'Common Knowledge' programme was implemented through the cooperation of local and county-level public institutions and NGOs (mainly organisations of community work and community development) in a consortium.[15] Previous community development and learning processes served as valuable experiences, and active locals were engaged in the community planning process in two ways. Firstly, residents and their NGOs were invited to community planning workshops. Secondly, the process was continued during four professional workshops conducted by the staff of the cultural centres located in the county.

The consortium presented the programme to the wider public in the county including community activists, local and county press. Opening events were organised principally to motivate and engage new stakeholders in community development and adult education. Community organisations and focal points for local action were introduced to newcomers by their neighbours, reinforcing the engagement of those who had been involved for longer and inspiring newcomers to join in, learn and act. Presentations were made by experts on a variety of themes related to community development and adult education. Information was distributed to participants about training available and on-the-spot applications were accepted. These events reinforced the belief of the stakeholders in their work.

Accreditation procedures started for adult education in two institutions, the county Institute for Culture and the Cultural Centre, Library and Museum of Edelény. Several adult education programmes were accredited including a 90-hour community mentoring training, a 90-hour community entrepreneurship training, and a 90-hour local guide for hiking and culture training.

Several non-formal training activities were implemented through learning circles. A learning circle is a small democratic group which functions according to the principles of dialogue and engages the active participation of all its members. It is a free form of learning in which the participants (as equals) strive to understand the processes taking place in the society around them. The participants learn in a democratic manner, and have the opportunity to take part in building the community. They learn to communicate, cooperate and to participate in community, social, cultural and political life.

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[15] Led by the county's Institute for Culture, the consortium included the cultural centre, library and museum in Edelény; the cultural centre and library in Hidasnémeti; the cultural centre in Tiszakarád; the cultural centre and library, Sajókaza; and the ÁMK community centre and library in Mezőcsát.

The study circles took place between December 2010 and March 2011, with five circles in each of the five regions in the county. They were organised on themes including agriculture, computer skills, traditional Hungarian embroidery, English and German language, etiquette and ballroom dancing, folk songs, cookery, handicrafts, local history, medicinal plants, and vintage motorcycles. Study trips were included and experts invited, tools and textbooks were purchased, and cooperation with partners was established to create prospects for continuity beyond the programme. The leaders of the study circles received training from community developers to ensure a positive learning experience for participants. An important concern was to involve as many local communities as possible, so each meeting was held in a different local community. The programme supported the transport costs of the participants to ensure maximum participation. As a result, a total of 1,102 people participated in 25 study circles.

The programme included various events to inform the residents of the county the opportunities offered. 22 such events were held along with several smaller meetings and press conferences for the local and county media. These events also served to establish continuous dialogue with beneficiaries of the programme about its results, further steps and possibilities for participation. The closing event that presented the results of the project was a true celebration involving all stakeholders, and giving all participants an opportunity to voice their feedback.

The success of this programme can be attributed to several factors. It united the resources of all the cooperating partners, and it drew on existing institutional capacity: the county Institute for Culture managed large scale funds, ran professional programmes, achieved accreditation and provided administrative support, and its staff came with prior experience in community development work. Positive cooperation existed between community developers and the Department of Cultural and Visual Anthropology at the University of Miskolc, which developed the research tools to identify training needs. The researchers built on the knowledge and social network of the community workers active in the area, and the students conducting the survey contributed fresh perspectives. Local community developers and their NGOs working in the county supported the programme, with their awareness of what could or would not work in the local context. The programme was based on a culture of discussion and dialogue, with all decisions taken together among concerned stakeholders and participants. Finally, the facilitation of the educational dimension of the programme was a true example of participation, as the curricula were developed according to the needs and knowledge of the stakeholders, while the training methods were those of adult education, built on the work and life experience of adults, and developed each topic through the broadest participation possible.

The programme did, however, also encounter a number of obstacles. Community and regional identity was weak among locals. They understood community more in administrative terms than in terms of a sense of belonging, and they have little interest or motivation to get involved in community affairs. Local NGOs tended to have limited horizons and few contacts beyond their villages. Given that the programme placed considerable emphasis on inter-community cooperation and partnership, much time and work was required to expand horizons. One of the greatest challenges, however, was to ensure continuity and sustainability. The programme certainly succeeded in increasing participation and citizen activity, and in building awareness of the importance of self-help and self-organising among participants. Nonetheless, the programme remained just a beginning in terms of real citizen activity.

Although the programme prepared members of the community to address problems they identified themselves, many of those problems could not be solved. Community enterprises are a case in point. Some viable business plans were drafted but project carriers lacked confidence to implement them and expected others to deliver solutions. In addition, discrepancies remain between social and citizen participation. The study circles demonstrated that interest in cultural traditions dominates over interest in the development of a modern democratic lifestyle and active citizenship, with handicrafts more popular than English language or computer skills. This problem extends to cooperation with the local governments and 'real' citizen action, such as participating in decision-making, advocacy or lobbying, which are not yet on the horizon for most resident groups. People living in these communities continue to know little about the mechanisms of democracy. Some participants of the educational activities also found it hard to work with the non-frontal and participatory training methods used, not surprising perhaps given the rigid educational system they had learned in earlier.

Mistrust persisted despite the fact that examples of good practice accumulated. Some of it can be traced back to the phenomenon of anomy, which is said to be greater in new democracies.[16] Mistrust is also nurtured by the experience that reality is becoming more complex and uncertain, and many people find it hard to see where they fit in. In this project, this was manifest in the reluctance among some participants to share their contact information and to participate systematically in the study circles. In sum, this programme clearly demonstrated that the social environment for community participation remains challenging in rural areas.

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[16] The Central European Opinion Research Group has been researching public opinion in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary on social issues, including anomy, since 1999. Research has included dimensions of anomy, such as loneliness, lack of orientation, powerlessness, alienation, breaking norms, lack of relationships among members of society, and indifference towards other people's problems.

All the same, there have been substantial results. Working with local knowledge and understanding through the participation of local people in planning this programme helped to build the self-confidence of locals to engage in adult education. Most of them, like other people of low qualification, were afraid of adult education because they thought that they would not be able to learn, let alone teach. The broad base of cooperation established during the programme broadened the view of all stakeholders on opportunities they can create jointly, and improved their self-confidence and comfort in working on community issues, cooperation with 'ordinary' people and facilitating mutual learning.

While it is not usual for cultural institutions to conduct adult education and community development, or to base their work on local demands and engage residents, there are technical and mentality barriers to this approach. Examples of such encountered by the institutions that joined the programme include the need for flexible working hours and for adaptation to developments in the community.

It can be concluded that the programme presented here has achieved what could be achieved under the specific circumstances in which it was rolled out. Although its results are partial, they can be turned into a solid foundation for future development if the actors of the three sectors – government, NGOs and business – can muster the energy needed for systematic, continuous and long-term work, and the vision to take their co-operation onto a larger scale of socio-economic developments in the county.

This is not an easy task in contemporary Hungary, given the general lack of resources, the difficulty of accessing development funds, their bureaucratic nature and the project-based approach preferred by funders. Funds granted are generally available for the short-term, they do not necessarily address goals defined by the locals concerned, and there is no guarantee they will be continued once the project is finished. In the same vein, this programme presents examples of the main problems of community development in rural areas. Participation in public issues and community development are not yet incorporated into the local culture. Skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for managing modern, democratic societies are lacking, and policy-makers have not taken the necessary steps to fill the gaps. Instead of institutional frameworks securing development, NGOs and local government institutions are struggling to meet contemporary challenges without suitable instruments. In sum, the mechanisms supporting development by communities for communities are not yet established in Hungary.

It must also be admitted that community development and civil society (no matter their will and persistence) cannot compensate for the state and its policies. The attitude of government authorities towards citizen initiatives is often problematic. Hobby groups, which do not present alternative opinions, are well liked and in exchange for small-scale

support, they readily legitimate the authorities' approach. In turn, citizen initiatives working for change, engaging in advocacy or taking an alternative position to the official line of those in power, do not receive support. What is more, development remains the privilege of those whose work corresponds to the priorities identified in the national development plan financed by the EU. No national or local resources are available to finance local development. Local governments struggle to make ends meet, even when it comes to their core tasks, while local development has become a task for others, especially the EU. In the local context, the short-term logic of the project-based approach means that after 18 months of employment, people return to unemployment. If the mobilised residents cannot access the tools needed for the realisation of their plans, like free and accessible adult education, affordable community development assistance, capital to start up companies or the resources necessary to make applications for external funding, and if these are not available into the medium-term at least, then development will remain the cause of an enthusiastic few rather than many.

Case study II: Infrastructure for citizen education – the Civil College Foundation

It is Friday afternoon and a group of men and women, younger and older community members, have gathered for a weekend training at the Civil College Foundation. A group of eight arrived from villages nearby and seven others represent the community development association of Békés County in Eastern Hungary. A third group of seven are from Vas County in the West of the country. They drop their luggage in their rooms and before even taking a proper look around, they go to work on their first assignment – an exhibition of five typical objects from the area where they live for presentation to the other participants. Flyers from NGOs, a toy car, a miner's lamp, potatoes, two bottles of wine, a bowl of fruit, home-made cookies, a brochure of a local cooperative, a photomontage of a city, documents from fieldwork conducted by a university, diaries from associations, a CD of local radio programmes, tourism brochures – the objects speak volumes about the places where the participants come from. This is the typical way a community training starts in the training centre of the Civil College, in Upper-Kiskunság, Kunbábony, some 70 km south of Budapest. It is also the first step towards establishing cooperation between three faraway places in Hungary.[17]

In presenting the work of the Civil College Foundation, this case study demonstrates the role of empowerment in community interventions, and of the informal and formal learning processes that come with it.[18] These are to raise awareness among citizens, develop the scope of their action, and clarify their roles and relations with the government and the

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[17] This section is mainly based on the work of Máté Varga. For further information on the Civil College Foundation, see Henderson, P., and Vercseg, I., *Community development and civil society. Making connections in the European Context* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2010), pp 157-163.

[18] For detailed information, see the online presence of the Civil College Foundation.

business sector. They transmit the importance of taking on these roles of advocacy and human rights defence, motivate learning of relevant techniques of citizen action, and help citizens to appreciate the wider context of their actions. Learning processes also highlight the importance of networks and cooperation for harnessing opportunities for community development.

From time to time, it is necessary for active community members to step back from their day-to-day involvement with their own communities, and to take a look at their lives with some distance and through the eyes of others. This enables self-reflection and prompts thinking in terms of the broader context, and it helps to understand what community, participation, democracy and civil society mean, and how actors of the governmental, non-governmental and business sectors can contribute to local development by the community.

An adult education component has been part of Hungarian community development from the very beginning. Nevertheless, this idea of occasionally taking the necessary distance was incorporated only in the early 1990s. In 1994, the Hungarian Association for Community Development (HACD) launched the Civil College Foundation, an NGO aiming to support the necessary skills for empowerment and local action.[19]

Every citizen needs to learn democracy, no matter whether they were socialised in a new or an older democracy. Even when supported by an enabling democratic environment and relevant socialisation, life-long learning, through exchange of information, adult education and community action among others, is vital. However, the institutions of learning democracy remain weak in Hungary. The institutions of public education should develop elementary democratic attitudes and practices, and should prepare its students for active citizenship. Adult education should concentrate on continuing or supplementing this process, that is, to empower individuals and their communities based on local needs and existing experience, so that they understand and develop their roles and act as citizens. New kinds of training programmes, methods and trainers experienced in community work are required to implement such adult education. Hungary has few adult education initiatives that work outside of the traditional framework of purely theoretical or market-oriented responses to the problems of society, or that integrate training and practical work with citizens and communities, so that the starting and the end points of development work are organically embedded in contemporary local realities.

In Hungary, the development professions (whether in the community, rural, cultural or social fields) do not dispose of the necessary instruments or competences to discharge their

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[19] Further information about the Hungarian Association for Community Development (HACD) is available from the organisation's website.

functions to the best potential.[20] This partly owes to the limited political will and resources available from the state, the NGO and business sectors. It is hardly surprising, then, that opportunities for civic and adult education have remained few and far between.

In this context, the Civil College Foundation is a remarkable establishment. It is principally a national-level institution, although it also serves the community development processes of the region in which it is located. While Hungary is in the process of learning democracy, new institutions for training and adult education that broaden the knowledge and practices required for everyday democracy have not been established – with the exception of the Civil College. The first of its kind, several factors motivated the establishment of this institution.

In general, the experience of political change suggested that lifelong learning for democracy should be organised more systematically and professionally. On the one hand, there was evidence that people were eager to seize new opportunities for local action, as manifest in the rapid growth of the NGO sector in Hungary and in vibrant election contests on the local level. On the other hand, however, citizens that wished to engage faced obstacles that originated in their limited knowledge about democratic procedures, a deficit the Civil College was to address. A second motivation was with the weak capacity of the Hungarian NGO sector to influence political decision-making, and one of the objectives of the Civil College was, therefore, to empower NGOs to reach their goals through democratic cooperation in formalised relationships with local authorities. In so doing, it helps to bridge the gap between NGOs and local authorities, and emphasises the necessity of partnership building between both on the basis of mutual interest and understanding. Thirdly, there was a lack of formally recognised and professionally run training opportunities to help citizens find solutions for specific practical problems. It is difficult to motivate citizens to engage in adult education if they cannot see immediate practical outcomes that benefit their daily work and lives, or if the quality of the training is poor. Finally, qualified training staff was also needed. Some training offers existed for non-profit organisations but few, if any, were available for participants of local community development processes.

From the outset, strengthening participation and encouraging civic action have been a major priority for the Civil College. It is mainly active in economically, socially and culturally disadvantaged areas and local communities of Hungary. In the first ten years of its work, it was active mainly in training to bolster community development fieldwork and to support Hungary's community development experts. Since 2007, however, increased emphasis has been put on national and international networks, movements and interdisciplinary

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[20] As an illustration, there are no mid- and long-term funding schemes to support structural and social development, and that would cover the costs of community programmes and experts.

cooperation related to community development. This has considerably broadening the activities and reach of the Civil College to include new target groups and training themes.[21]

This evolution has enabled the Civil College to act on multiple levels and to react to the problems and situations experienced by local communities. It is in direct contact with citizens active on the local level. It develops interdisciplinary cooperation and networks, participates in lobbying activities, engages in broad international cooperation, and it offers training to local communities and individual citizens, with the aim of strengthening civil society, local participation and community action.

The Civil College was founded and developed on the basis and experiences of similar education and community development initiatives in Europe. Exploratory study visits were conducted in the early 1990s to similar organisations and colleges in Yorkshire in the United Kingdom. Considering their experience, as well as the Hungarian context, and with the support of the Hungarian Association of Community Development (HACD), a host-town was found for the establishment of a training complex for community activists and civil volunteers.

A one-time elementary school located in Kunbábony was converted into an educational and community centre and opened in June 1997. The building has eight rooms with bathrooms, a classroom, and a large living and dining room, and it can accommodate 32 in-residence training participants at any one time. It is surrounded by a park, which can be used as a campsite in summer when more accommodation is required for larger events. The reconstruction of both the building and the park area was funded by Hungarian firms and foreign foundations.

The opening of this educational and community centre was accompanied by getting to know the locals and the context. The Civil College began a community development process in the area, which continues to this day and through which local activists from surrounding communities receive training. Civil society in the region has developed considerably since the opening of the Civil College in 1997. Community radio and local media have been supportive to Civil College efforts, and the College hosts regular meetings between NGOs and visitors from other parts of Hungary and abroad.

The Civil College Foundation is a social organisation with public benefit status. In 2003, it received state accreditation as an institute of adult education. Participants in its training activities are civic and community activists, often from marginalised or vulnerable social

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[21] Examples include experimental community development programmes, and interdisciplinary summer university, national and international networking, and co-organisation of the annual 'Citizen Participation Week'.

groups, such as Roma or unemployed people. With the help of a syllabus based on the principles of participatory adult education methodology, they learn to think from their community's point of view, while at the same time acquiring skills for civic action. The number of participants in a course varies from 14 to 32. Each year, some 700 to 800 people enrol in training courses at the Civil College.

Initially, college trainers were rather community developers than trainers or facilitators of learning processes, and it was necessary to prepare them for their new training functions. In 1995, ten Hungarian community developers participated in a training course on the methodology of adult education at the Northern College in Yorkshire. Two years later, the Civil College offered five weekend training courses on general themes, including community, civic activism, democracy, local economy, and community media. Besides these standard trainings, activities were organised to meet specific needs within on-going community development processes, often in cooperation or with the support of partners.

In 2001-2002, the Civil College began to organise international trainings, starting with an 80-hour training of trainers' programme for 55 participants from Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. A few years later, a professional training programme in community development and community work was developed, with modules ranging from 45- and 60-hour supplementary trainings to a 120-hour basic-level course and a 300-hour trainer qualification. Most recently, the Civil College was involved in developing even more advanced training offers. Jointly with the Hungarian Association for Community Development and the Department for Social Work and Social Policy at ELTE University in Budapest, it designed and accredited the professional courses in civic studies and community organising, and an MA level course on Community and Civic Studies.

The Civil College also organises three to four national or international seminars, conferences and workshops each year. It is a member of three international networks: the Central and Eastern European Citizens Network, the Training and Learning Community Development Network, and the pan-European E-Participation Network.

Since 2007, the training programme of the Civil College has been revised and adjusted in approach and orientation. Participants are now given the opportunity to compile and build their own training curriculum based on their needs. Each weekend course is considered as a module. As a result of the internal credit system, those completing five modules can apply for an examination and receive a basic-level degree in community development. Participants receive a certificate and an index containing the courses they have completed and the credits they have acquired. Online technologies are used for the communication and organisation of training courses.

The Civil College aims to provide professional support for active local people. Its training system is to enhance community development and citizen action with long-term sustainability. It does so by linking community development with adult education, which allows for activities to be adapted to actual local and social processes, and ensures that the involvement of target groups is not undertaken on a once-off or short-term basis. The topics covered by training courses assume a conscious and lasting commitment and include community development, participation, advocacy, civic organising, partnership, local media, economic development and enterprise, digital literacy and the development of Hungarian democracy.[22] The following brief example illustrates how this approach by the Civil College translates into work with local groups of citizens.

Budapest's 10th district (Kőbánya) was once an important working class area but traditional industries have been in decline for much of the last 20 years, with negative effects on employment and the neighbourhood more broadly. In this district, a project was launched by the Hungarian Association for Community Development (HACD) in 1996 to create alternative services for child day-care, to encourage and help young parents to find ways to get into contact with each other, and to help them manage their lives in the community through a identifying common needs, cooperation, and mutual support. Local parents were to organise themselves and to generate community-based services. Until 1999, this effort was supported by eight training courses run at and by the Civil College.

A first outcome was the establishment of a new local association, the Parents' Association, in autumn 1997. The association's responsibility, roles and contribution as well as a work plan for the first two years were defined in a training session, and three further trainings were held for staff of local nurseries on alternative models of providing public services.[23] Five courses were held for active local residents and for the Parents' Association, with a focus on planning, computer skills, registering and managing an association, running meetings, negotiating with decision-makers, and fundraising, community and voluntary work in the neighbourhood.

As a result of the trainings, two project proposals were submitted to the local council and to its different committees at the beginning of 1998, for the improvement of the neighbourhood's environment. Representatives of the association were invited to three committee meetings responsible for parks and playgrounds. By the end of the year, a

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[22] Varga, Máté, Benedek, G., Bodorkós, B., Giczey, P., Gyenes, Zs., Kovács, E., Mészáros, Zs., Peták, P., Péterfi, F., Pósfay, P., Varga, M., and Vercseg, I., *The new training system of the Civil College Foundation* (Budapest: Civil Kollégium Alapítvány, 2008).

[23] Alternative models of providing public services are those that do not exclusively rely on professionals but are based on the participation of local people. One key element of the trainings was preparation for more open cooperation between caretakers and parents.

renewal programme for the parks and playgrounds of two neighbourhoods was started with the participation of local people.

However, the most valuable outcome was not the renovation itself, or the sharing of the work among the local government and the residents, but the fact that the Parents' Association managed to constructively regulate the use of public spaces and to avoid confrontation with the authorities. Instead, everyone got the space and possibilities they needed, from playgrounds suitable to each age group (toddlers, children), to sports facilities for young people and space for leisure-time activities for parents and the elderly, to a designated area for dog-walking. The Parents' Association and the local government also agreed and planned the joint maintenance of public spaces.[24]

Such positive experiences notwithstanding, the last years have been taxing for the Civil College and its partners in local communities across Hungary. The economic crisis has left the Civil College strapped of financial means and capacity, and forced it to abandon some of its plans. Available resources have had to be ploughed into on-going obligations, and there have been fewer and fewer opportunities for accessing other or new resources. By the autumn of 2011, the Civil College Foundation was no longer funded at all from Hungarian sources, and there was no perspective of European funding in the short-term. Meanwhile, new challenges that required immediate reaction in form of training offers emerged. Under the current conditions, the Civil College finds it hard to intervene, and its priorities are fundraising and management related.

Adding to these difficulties is the fact the governmental sector is thoroughly indifferent to the efforts and work of the Civil College, despite its vital and proven importance. Planning takes place without organisations like the Civil College, community groups and citizens at large. Local government officials neither see the need for partnership nor are they willing to engage in training. In short, participatory decision-making remains a distant prospect in Hungary today.

Thus less successful domestically, the Civil College has seen more effective cooperation on the international level. Its involvement in strengthening dialogue among politicians and citizens – through the People and Politics programme since 2007–2008 – in national and international awareness-raising of the importance of citizen participation – though the annual Citizen Participation Week since 2005 – are but two examples of the growing importance of international work for the Civil College Foundation.[25]

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[24] For more detail, see Deller, U., and Brake, R. (eds.), *Community Development – A European Challenge* (Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2008), pp. 61-64.
[25] For detail, see the websites of the People and Politics programme and Citizen Participation Week.

Its somewhat mixed experience notwithstanding, the very existence of the Civil College Foundation ought to be considered a success. The continuous operation of such an institution at a high level of quality is significant in a social environment where no real government support exists for adult education, and learning for certificates remains more important than learning for knowledge. Thanks to the voluntary commitment of many, the Civil College continues to advance social development processes and to pursue positive change. It does so by building community-oriented and democratic attitudes, trust, participation and cooperation among citizens – in short, social capital has been generally acknowledged as defining the social and economic success of a given area, region or country.

Case study III: The long fight of citizens against a military radar in the Mecsek

A protest movement to prevent the construction of a NATO radar station is the subject of the following case study.[26] Lasting from 2005 to 2010, and carried by the Istenkút Community Association, the Civil Movement for the Mecsek, its campaign and its impact on the political environment can be seen as a rare example of success in the politics of contention in Hungary.

Pécs is a city of almost 160,000 people located on the southern slopes of the Mecsek Mountains in Southwest Hungary. This area has a large population as a result of coal and uranium deposits in the region that led, during the 20th century, to considerable industrialisation and urbanisation. However, economic restructuring after 1989 led to the closure of the mines and heavy industries. In part, Pécs has been able to compensate for its industrial decline by strengthening its cultural role, as the home of a university with some 30,000 students, as the location of important cultural heritage sites (early Christian tombs) that have earned the city UNESCO World Heritage status, and as a historically multi-ethnic and multi-cultural town. As a European Capital of Culture in 2010, Pécs underwent significant infrastructural development. These advantages notwithstanding, the city remains economically weak and local authorities struggle with large debts.

Efforts to construct a radar station in Pécs first elicited a strong and successful response from the Hungarian civic and environmentalist movement in 2004 when local activists and country-wide organisations prevented the construction of a NATO installation on the Zengő Mountain, the highest peak of the Mecsek mountain-range, and 16 km from Pécs. In 2005, the Hungarian government declared that the new location for the proposed radar station was the Tubes Hill, located within 1 km of residential areas and only 4 km from the city centre of Pécs. The building was to reach a height of about 60 meters, was to be

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[26] This case study has been authored by Péter Peták.

accompanied by a diesel fuel tank and a wastewater container, and to be located in a protected forest in the water replenishment area of the city.

This announcement came without prior consultation with the residents of Pécs who were primarily concerned about the health and environmental consequences of the radar station. Not only the unknown long-term effects of exposure to microwaves gave rise to concern but also the planned placement of the radar above the most valuable source of freshwater of the city. Adding to this was fear of possible attacks on the radar, after all a military installation and thus a prime target. Some residents further opposed the radar as an infrastructure of war, while others objected to the non-democratic, top-down, and power-based approach that attempted to push the project through against the will of the local residents, as well as against building and conservation regulations. As it emerged, reprehensible mistakes were made during the decision-making process by the local government and the Ministry of Defence.

While these issues were of most concern to the residents and citizens, political factors relating to the identity of Pécs also played an important role in raising the profile of the radar case. At the time, Pécs was essentially governed in an oligarchic way. The mayor, a strong national politician from the Socialist Party, considered the city his empire. Rumour had it that the Mayor, who announced the relocation of the radar station to the Tubes Hill together with the Prime Minister, agreed to it in exchange for the title of European Capital of Culture. While these suspicions were neither substantiated nor refuted, they reflect the situation in the city, where citizens complained about despotism, behind-the-scenes negotiations, abuses of power, a puppet local government and the one-man administration of the city.

Another motive of the anti-radar movement relates to the vision for the city. After the collapse of the local industries and mining, Pécs chose health, environmental and cultural industries as focal points for its development. Consequently, locals were unhappy with the idea of a military object being erected above the city, as it would ruin Pécs' newly established image.

Organising against the construction of the radar station began in the winter of 2005-2006. The first public event was an 'open university' organised by the Union for Pécs Association, which also had representatives in the local government. Next a *Fidesz* parliamentary candidate called for a protest rally on Tubes Hill.[27] In January 2006, after a series of negotiations the Civic Movement for the Mecsek was founded. Its name referred to the Civic Movement for the Zengő, the movement that succeeded in preventing the

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[27] *Fidesz*, or the Union of Young Democrats, is one of the major political parties in Hungary. At the time of these events, it was in opposition in the Hungarian parliament. Since 2010, it is the governing party.

construction of the radar at the original location. It also expressed that the aim of the movement was to prevent the construction of the radar altogether, and not to have it moved back to the original location. At the same time, the Ministry of Defence held a public forum in the community centre of Istenkút, the neighbourhood located on the slope of the Tubes Hill. This was the first opportunity for a mass protest, which succeeded and boosted the membership of the Civil Movement for the Mecsek. While it was impressive and created opportunities for action, this success was not favourable for strategic thinking and coordinated tactics.

The opposition party *Fidesz* convened an emergency meeting that was reported on the front page of the county newspaper under the headline "The citizens didn't get their say". The Civic Movement for the Mecsek organised a street petition action to make the local government hold a public hearing on the case of the Tubes radar station. In parallel, the Association for the Community of Istenkút held a press conference where they made public that the local government of Pécs had broken the law when they reclassified the Tubes Hill as a defence area the previous November – it was alleged that the local representatives were not aware of this fact. The Association, which had the right to express its opinion, appealed this decision and requested that it be rescinded, without any result.

Faced with an 8,000-signature strong petition, the Mayor immediately announced a public hearing. The case of the public hearing demonstrates both the strengths and weaknesses of the Civic Movement for the Mecsek. On the one hand, the collection of the signatures was the movement's first experience with campaigning and organising. It was an impressive effort, with several collection points and street actions taking place in freezing weather. Although difficult and slow, the signature collection was an excellent opportunity for engaging and mobilising new people. The campaign showed that it was important to give motivated citizens the opportunity to engage and join the movement.

On the other hand, the public hearing pointed at the weaknesses of the movement. Two people appeared to the press as spokespersons, one of them interpreted the event as a triumph, the other as having made a mockery of democracy. Ironically, both were right. The triumph was in that the public hearing was ensured by citizen initiative, and that the citizens of Pécs presented their views calmly one after the other. The mockery of democracy was in the way the local government and Mayor reacted. According to the Mayor, "there was no Tubes case"; the representative of the Ministry of Defence was dozing on the podium; and the passing of the resolution was sabotaged, with several representatives instructed not to attend or to abstain. These opposing views of the event reflect a lack of coordination, as well as internal conflict within the Civic Movement for the Mecsek. Eventually, the 'militant' dominated over the more 'political' approach, which favoured an organised structure, regulated decision-making, and planning.

In the summer of 2006, the political situation in Pécs changed substantially, after the Mayor was incapacitated in a car accident and with local elections forthcoming. The Civic Movement for the Mecsek, in agreement with the Union for Pécs Association and the Association for the Community of Istenkút, decided to initiate a referendum on the radar station. This was to press political parties to take a stand on the case in their election campaigns. The referendum initiative was, however, late and when the collection of signatures could finally begin, the local election campaign was almost over. As a result, the political parties paid lip service to the case, saying only that they would await the result of the referendum before taking a position.

The collection of the signatures for the referendum was an almost impossible task for the team, which was not much bigger than for the petition for the public hearing. It had to collect signatures from 10 per cent of eligible voters in Pécs within one month. Eventually, nearly 19 thousand signatures were submitted to City Hall and after their verification, a local referendum was announced for March 2007.

While the campaign made extensive efforts to publicise the referendum through various media and other methods, it disposed of minimal private donations and remained almost invisible throughout the city. Neither the local party organisations nor the Ministry of Defence made an effort to engage in the referendum campaign. As a result, only 32.5 per cent of eligible voters participated, and the referendum was declared invalid. 94.3 per cent of those who cast their vote rejected the radar station, however. With this result, both sides claimed success. For the authorities, it was proof that the people of Pécs were not against the radar station. In turn, the Civic Movement for the Mecsek considered the result a victory for their campaign, as the overwhelming majority of votes that were cast were against the radar.

In any case, the referendum represented a political turning point. Until then passive, the Ministry of Defence launched the approval procedure for the construction of the radar. The Socialist local government became concerned that, while they were expected to cooperate with the national government, their own voters were against the radar. The referendum also brought the case to the attention of national media, although their coverage followed party lines, and the dominant story was that the campaign failed as a result of indifferent citizens. Local politicians, however, knew that this was not the case, as the new Mayor had attracted fewer votes than the campaign against the radar station. The whole episode triggered a storm, both in local politics and in the civic movement.

The people who considered the referendum a failure panicked and the campaign was stepped up extensively. A wave of demonstrations put pressure on the local government,

which eventually organised several rounds of discussion on the modification of the local construction code. However, this was nothing but political manoeuvring. The construction codes were modified appropriately only after the issuance of the building permit for the radar station, the construction ban demanded by the protesters was not ordered, and the local governing coalition suggested that the radar station be moved back to the Zengő Hill.

Representatives of the Civic Movement for the Mecsek and the Association for the Community of Istenkút travelled to the Czech Republic to exchange with the *Ne Zakladnam* movement that protested the installation of the US missile defence system there. Following this, two further campaigns were conducted by the Pécs movement, using more carefully planned marketing and design tools. One campaign brought together nearly 4,000 property owners living in and around Pécs who declared that if the construction of the radar station would go ahead they would sue the state for loss of value on their properties. The other campaign was a large demonstration called 'Unarmed Forces Day', attended by representatives of foreign and international organisations and protesters from Budapest.

At this point, the advocacy battle on the legal level began. NGOs, local individuals and the city administration appealed against the building permit issued for the radar station by the Minister of Defence. While the Budapest Municipal Court decided against the locals, the Supreme Court annulled the building permit in its review process in 2010.

The years of legal battle were anything but uneventful, although the campaign did not organise highly visible events, which weakened the Civic Movement for the Mecsek. Activities during this period included frequent but not mass actions, visits to the Tubes, marches distributing flyers, an event on the main square of Pécs celebrating partial successes in court, letter-writing actions to decision-makers, among others. In expectation of a negative decision by the courts, Greenpeace activists ran a training at the Istenkút community centre, teaching activists methods of active non-violence, so that in case of need a blockade of the Tubes could be organised.

The movement received an important boost when, on 30 March 2008, a national meeting of environmental organisations closed with a joint declaration of 39 organisations stating "… the undersigned organisations join the objectives of the Civil Movement for the Mecsek and ask the decision makers to take into account the implications on the residents and nature and do not build the planned radar station on the Tubes, nor on the Zengő, nor in any other protected areas of the Mecsek". This statement meant the recognition of the power of the Pécs movement.

Meanwhile, politics in the city took another unexpected turn. In January 2009, by-elections were held to elect a new Mayor. The Socialist Party, weakened at the national level as well,

presented a candidate that was well known and popular nationwide. Together with the other lead candidate of *Fidesz*, both contenders made the issue of the Tubes radar station the central theme of their campaigns and spent their campaigns trying to trump each other with promises to protect the city from the threat clearly represented by the construction of the radar station. The *Fidesz* candidate won the elections and soon had to make good on these promises.

By this time, the local government did not dispose of any credible instruments for preventing the construction from going ahead, given that the final building permit had already been issued. The new Mayor resorted to strong symbolic gestures in order to express the city's determination, including some radical forms of civic protest such as closing the dirt road leading to the designated radar site and setting up a tent camp with his friends from the party. This lent the case enormous media attention and generated sympathies nationwide. Locally, the Mayor increased his popularity.

The Supreme Court ended the standoff. The Association for the Community of Istenkút submitted an appeal against the building permit, ensuring that until a further decision of the Court, construction of the radar station could not begin. On 17 March 2010, the Supreme Court rescinded the building permit.

In terms of support, the movement was able to mobilise internal resources and to build on the commitment of volunteers – even the experts and lawyers involved in the campaign worked for free. Small-scale funds for potential expenses were raised from the members of the movement, and the campaign received several donations in kind. No major fundraising was necessary, because it was possible to decentralise costs through the membership network: the members photocopied, phoned, travelled or purchased poster glue and stickers at their own expense. NGO funding was also received in the form of grants, but these remained small in scale. One of these grants supported the publication of a book; another financed the 'Unarmed Forces Day' demonstration. Serious, organised fundraising took place during the real-estate depreciation campaign, as this initiative originated in a circle of organisers who acknowledged that such campaigns require money. They used a uniform corporate image and billboards at a cost of some 2 million forints (approximately 7,200 Euros), which was raised by about forty people. The capacity of this campaign to raise this level of funding was interpreted by the city administration as a further indicator for the strength of the movement. However, the availability or lack of money was not what defined the possibilities of the movement. More important were the offers of support in kind that came spontaneously: the café where a separate room was offered for meetings and press conferences; the artists who contributed with their creativity and shows; the celebrities that publicly expressed their support during the referendum campaign.

Local media, closely related to Pecs' political elites, were passive or supportive according to who was in power in the city administration. Only the county newspaper supported the movement consistently within the limits demanded by the unbiased objectivity of the press. The Pécs radar case reached the national public only with the referendum, but on this level the information provided was partial, politically motivated or opinionated, rather than supportive or hostile to the campaign. At the national level, the joint declaration adopted in 2008 by environmental organisations was of serious moral support. More practical external help was received from the Humanist Movement, Greenpeace and the Ombudsman for Future Generations. The political atmosphere in the city also became more supportive over the years.

The most powerful resource, however, were the citizens of Pécs, who mobilised personal networks and made the movement part of their lives. This ensured the greatest level of access and the largest capacity to mobilise possible. It provided for the rapid transmission of information and eventually created the critical mass that became a political factor.

In terms of obstacles, neither the government, nor the Ministry of Defence, nor the scarcity of resources proved to be most challenging. Rather, organisational difficulties and the polarised political environment hindered the effectiveness of the movement. The sudden growth of the organisation and the immediate taking on of high-risk activities, in particular, caused the team to neglect efforts to develop a mature organisational structure and a regulated decision-making process.

As such, something of a chaotic situation became business as usual. Meetings did not have agendas. Although there were issues to be decided, it was unclear who should address which question when. There were offers and independent pledges but rarely was there a clear mandate. However, eventually shared responsibilities emerged and individuals took on specific tasks. Meetings seemed more like quarrels over multiple issues than discussions, but this created decentralised operations in which small circles came up with ideas and initiatives, and in which detailed arrangements were decided upon. The meetings of the broader team, then, served the clarification of the main directions.

This process was emotionally stressful and consumed a lot of resources, but proved effective in developing cooperation among committed people. Although not a conscious strategy, this approach helped the movement to keep its openness, and it offered people the possibility of joining a variety of activities. Even membership was not formalised – it was not always clear whether a given person considered themselves a member of the movement or were considered members by the others. This organisational approach weakened the movement especially in external communication, relations with other

organisations, and in terms of the uniformity of the campaign image, and in some cases, it even had negative effects on personal relationships.

A special challenge to overcome was the tendency in public opinion and the media to consider the anti-radar protesters as a selfish rebel minority with political motivations. Even in some of the better-informed Budapest circles, the situation was seen as a classical case of 'not in my backyard'. The media presented statements to the effect that the radar was necessary and had to be built.

Adding to this was the political polarisation of Hungarian society. Simplified interpretations of every public issue were common, and the challenge in the Pécs radar case was to argue in unison against the positions of local and national authorities, both Socialist, without scaring off left-wing sympathisers. Following national trends, voters in Pécs moved to the right, and accompanied by the anti-radar rhetoric of the local *Fidesz* party, this shift weakened the independence of the Civic Movement for the Mecsek. The prolonged struggle over more than five years wore the movement down, and by the end of the campaign, party interests were indeed at play in the movement. This disappointed those who valued the independence of civic action.

The greatest achievement of a protest movement is when it succeeds in preventing what it was protesting against. In this case, the Civic Movement for the Mecsek succeeded in preventing the construction of the radar station at the Tubes location. A spontaneous and issue-based initiative, the campaign did not develop into a sustainable organisation, however. Once it reached its goal, the movement ceased to exist. The broad network of relationships that it developed, however, remained and may be mobilised later and for future issues, if only partially.