

# Local engagement for Roma inclusion

## Locality study Besence (Hungary), 2016

Author: Tibor Béres

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## 1. Executive summary

The aim of the case study is to summarise the lessons learnt from the LERI research in three disadvantaged villages in southern Hungary in the Ormánság micro-region. The local LERI research **aimed to involve local Roma communities** in the community planning and implementing of small-scale projects. The basic idea was to adapt the agricultural model of Besence in two other neighbouring villages, but this aim was later modified in accordance with the more defined needs of the villages during the implementation phase. Finally, community needs-based, small-scale activities were implemented using participatory action research (PAR) methods.

In **Besence**, participants prepared a local development strategy and the local equality plan was updated. In **Csányoszló** a chicken-breeding project was implemented, and LERI research participants from **Vajszló** decided to organise a 15-week-long dance course for the residents of the village.

The local experiences from the LERI research show that in general the main challenge is linked to the **low motivation of local people**, which has its roots in the profound local disappointment in development projects and policies in general. The **conclusion** is that any development project that aims at stimulating local growth in an effective way in the long term has to be completed based on a step-by-step methodology running a series of local, small-scale projects in a row and employing sensitive and flexible project frameworks to avoid the phenomenon of 'indicatorism' that focuses on the project-based, measurable indicators rather than on meeting real development problems and improving the lives of the local target groups.

**Keywords/Tags:** *small-scale projects, PAR method, indicatorism, involvement of the local Roma communities.*

## 2. Description of the local context

According to the 2011 census figures Roma people constitute about 3 % of the Hungarian population, but unofficial estimates put this rate as high as 7–9 %. Members of the community are dispersed across the country, but tend to be concentrated in the rural, poorer north-eastern and south-western parts of Hungary.

Approximately 50 % of the total population of Besence (132 inhabitants) is Roma, most of them belong to the Beás group, which uses the archaic, traditional Romanian language. They are very keen to differentiate themselves from the other two groups of Roma also living in Hungary (the Vlach and the Romungro). Based upon the result of the census (2011), 21 persons declared themselves Roma but the mayor estimates this to be significantly higher.<sup>1</sup> A significant part of the original local non-Roma population has left the village in

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<sup>1</sup> Demography data: KSH: Based on Census 2011, Central Statistical Office; [www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/reszletes\\_tablak](http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/reszletes_tablak) and [www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/gdpter/gdpter10.pdf](http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/gdpter/gdpter10.pdf).

recent decades because of the lack of employment and income-generating opportunities. Meanwhile the demographic index was positive in the Roma families, while many old non-Roma residents have died. All of these demographic changes are turning Besence into a 'Roma village'.

Besence is located in the southern part of Hungary, in the Ormánság micro-region that is mainly characterised by rural activities and small settlements. Csányoszró, Gilvánfa, Vajszló and Nagycsány are the villages closest to Besence in the micro-region.

The mayor of Besence initiated an agricultural project in 2008 to cultivate the small lands belonging to the houses in the village, with funding from the National Employment Public Foundation. Later, the local municipality established Okormente Nonprofit Ltd to develop this agricultural activity into the so-called Besence Model. It focuses on 'work-intensive' farming, growing vegetables (peppers, melons, cucumbers and other vegetables that are marketable). The biggest obstacle to the future expansion of the company is, however, the lack of locally available land.

The village and the mayor received nationwide media attention in 2013 because of a tennis court that was built in the very poor village. It was a symbolic action rather than a real sports investment, with the aim of demonstrating that people in Besence are reclaiming their dignity and want to open up by connecting with the 'outside world'.<sup>2</sup>

By 2016, the only employer in Besence is the Okormente Nonprofit Ltd (herein referred to as Okermente Ltd). Its total income was approximately HUF 15 million in 2013 and it had a HUF 20 million yearly budget. It employed 31 people in 2014, co-financed by the fund received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Although the mayor, Mr. Ignác, hesitated to run again at the municipal elections in October 2014, ultimately he won the election with 40 votes (against 31 votes cast in favour of the opposite candidate). While Vajszló has welcomed Mr. Istvan Horvath as their re-elected mayor, Mr. Nagyfi, mayor of Csányoszró was elected into office for the first time.<sup>3</sup>

Following the recommendations from Mr. Ignác, the mayors of two neighbouring villages were involved in the kick off LERI meetings after the preparatory phase of LERI research in 2015. Representatives of the two villages, Vajszló and Csányoszró, claimed that they were open to participating in local LERI research. Their involvement was the result of discussions among the mayors and their explicit interest in the potential adaptation and spread of the local economic development model from Besence. In addition, there were local expectations that cooperation between the local Roma communities could also strengthen the market position of Okormente Ltd in Besence in the regional context.

The local team in the localities involved in the LERI research included: the mayor of Besence, the leader of the Roma Minority Self-Government in Vajszló and one

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<sup>2</sup> For the trailer of the movie on this initiative, follow the link here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zf2Hrd8mu\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zf2Hrd8mu_g), for the whole movie, 'Besence Open': [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oT9ZGAU1ico](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oT9ZGAU1ico)

<sup>3</sup> Results of the Municipality election in 2014 <http://valasztas-2014.info/>, [http://valasztas.hu/hu/ogyv2014/455/455\\_0.html](http://valasztas.hu/hu/ogyv2014/455/455_0.html)

local co-researcher from Csányoszló. In addition, further local stakeholders were invited to participate at the various LERI mapping and planning activities such as the mayors of the other localities (Vajszló, Csányoszló) and representatives of the local communities. Finally, due to the main objectives of the local activities (to mobilise the local population) several local actions were organised to reach out to local community members in general.

The original idea behind employing in LERI research local co-researchers was twofold. Firstly, it was to support the research element of the project with their observations while undertaking project activities. The second was merely practical: helping with the organisational activities because the LERI field expert could not undertake this work due to the distances he was required to travel and the lack of local contacts.

The mayor of Besence stuck to his position expressing that without his support, local LERI activities would not be undertaken (expecting honorarium from the research, as was often the case in past projects). He also proposed to employ a co-researcher in Csányoszló, who coordinates the public workers in local office (and is also a relative of his wife).

The third co-researcher, for Vajszló, was recruited and employed without this background pressures. Talking to local stakeholders, the LERI field expert found a well-respected Roma man who took up this position. However, he later had to resign because he got a regular job. Instead of this co-researcher, the leader of Vajszló's Roma Minority Self-Government was asked to join the project. She was the coordinator in the state-run micro-regional vocational training and resource centre.

Each local LERI co-researcher had good administrative and organisational skills. This was important because it is not typical that three Roma actors with the necessary skills can be found in three neighbouring villages. Furthermore, the lack of skilled people is often an obstacle to the successful implementation of local projects.

The tasks of the local LERI co-researchers were mainly organisational activities until halfway through the project (see later section) and the evaluation process was carried out with their support (especially in Csányoszló and Vajszló) as well.

### 3. PAR methodology employed

#### PAR methods

The local LERI research was based on the hypothesis that local communities could be involved through using participatory methods and applying participatory action research (PAR). Because of their involvement, the local inhabitants would be considered as active partners of the decision-makers, who could develop individual and community-based development plans to be incorporated into the development strategies, documents and activities in their villages.

The original aim of the local LERI research was to further develop the ongoing socio-economic activity in Besence and share its experience with the other two localities, Csányoszló and Vajszló. The benefit for Besence seemed to be that

sharing local experiences would help local people by improving their self-respect and help them find new ways (ideas) to develop local initiatives. During the implementation phase, the original plan was amended to include further local activities (for more details, see next section).

Following the selection and preparatory phases of the LERI research in 2013 and 2014, the LERI field expert started working on the needs assessment with the involvement of the local actors in 2015. He relied on participatory methods with the aim of developing the LERI Local Project Plan (LPP); this was finalised in collaboration with local actors in August 2015.

Core local problems were identified in an interactive way with local habitants while running **citizens forums**. All participants had to mention one individual problem (regardless of the feasibility of the solution) and one thing that they were proud of (the latter was important to interrupt lengthy complaints and negative statements). Overwhelming share of local people mentioned lack of job opportunities and low level of available income as the most crucial problems. Just a few of them referred to other problems, such as the rigid and unrealistic regulatory framework for entrepreneurs or personal problems at their place of work. There was also one inhabitant who wanted to leave the village and the country but did not have the money to do this.

Participants were also asked to mention common problems that are present in the villages. The overall opinion was that low wages and lack of access to the local lands (owned by two big farms with well-developed machinery) were the most significant challenges.

Participants were reluctant to talk about their positive values, which they are proud of. The majority was proud of their children, grandchildren and just a few persons mentioned individual achievements (e.g. job) or other things. It clearly seemed that PAR-based activities might increase the self-esteem of local people and therefore crucial to be implemented in small-scale local projects.

Participants were asked how they could improve their situation. What could they do? What do they need for that? The answer was mainly 'nothing', but as a result of a **drama exercise** some ideas emerged. The participants formed groups, elected 'mayors', and they were informed that their village had been granted HUF 50 million for local development activities. They were asked to think about reasonable opportunities for development and how to use the fund, because a 'visitor who wants to settle down' will ask them why they chose the mentioned development projects. The negotiator had to convince the visitor to join the local development action and become an active member of the local community.

The ideas that emerged during this activity included a summer camp run by Roma women for the children, the revitalisation of the local community centre, the development of touristic attractions (e.g. 'Adventure Park'), free-time activities and the implementation community-based agricultural projects.

The interactive methods were useful for the following reasons: firstly, a simple listing of the positive values of the village is usually formal and results in stereotypes (friendly people, good atmosphere, clean streets, etc.). By the 'selling discussion', participants have to argue why the mentioned assets are important and if they are really present in the village. Secondly, positive values

are ranked during the 'selling meeting' and therefore this helps clarification. Thirdly, only interactive and verbal methods can be used effectively in these communities involving the majority of the participants because of the low level of reading and writing skills. For this reason, the LERI field expert avoided the use of PowerPoint presentations. Finally, local feedback is very important to evaluate the development of the local strategy and also to assess the local skills necessary to plan and run such a strategy, as these are crucial inputs to the future capacity-/skill-building training and events. Based on the LERI field expert's experience, vulnerable communities suffer from the lack of, or low skills in open public discussions, experience in community-driven decision-making. These create serious barriers to participation and engagement in local affairs that can, however, be overcome by various techniques – also used by the LERI field expert later on.

Local inhabitants were usually self-critical when they mentioned the problems of local society. It was stated that one of the biggest obstacles to local development was the lack of motivation of people (with the argumentation that 'they had lost faith in the promises').

In Csányoszló, villagers mentioned that there are no childcare services during the summertime. Another issue was the lack of regular free-time activities. Organising the meeting for the needs assessment was difficult in Vajszló. Three meetings were organised prior to January 2016 but the number of participants (and mainly that of Roma people) was very low (3–6 persons). Finally, the local LERI co-researcher informed the local community about the available LERI Local Fund (LF) and personally convinced the local municipality and other local stakeholders to participate. At the end around 20 local persons came to the meeting (half of them were Roma). The LERI field expert decided to use a **simpler method** here than in the other two locations because this was his first encounter with majority of the locals and they stated they had no more than one and half hours for the meeting.

All participants had to mention one individual problem (regardless of the probability of a solution) and one thing they were proud of. The latter was important to avoid a long list of complaints and negative statements. Like in the other settlements, the main challenge turned out to be related to the lack of job opportunities and the prevalent low income level.

The LERI field expert also asked the participants to list the positive and negative aspects of the village. Items were grouped according to whether the local community could influence (improve) the negative points and which positive points could be developed. The final list was used to define possible community projects.

The fact that there are several restaurants in the village and there is a new training and research centre (run by the government agency responsible for vocational training of the long-term unemployed and for EU and state-funded local employment projects in the country) were highly appreciated by the local people. In addition, they also referred to the low crime rate in the village, to the lack of significant conflicts reported between the Roma and non-Roma inhabitants, to good quality public services (pharmacy, doctor's surgery, shops, groceries), and to the geographically central position of the village. It should also

be noted that the local kindergarten and elementary school works with integrated classes and there is no discrimination in the local school.

Among the negative factors, participants mentioned the low motivation of the local people, the low participation in community programmes, and their struggle to involve local people in community projects. There is a lack of jobs in the micro-region and a lack of investment. The biggest employer is the municipality who operates the public work programme. The average income is low, people have lost perspective and there is a high level of migration to other parts of the country and to (Western) EU countries. The infrastructure is poor (poor public transportation to Pécs, lack of a waste-water system), and there is a lack of free-time programmes and youth clubs.

Another PAR method applied during these events was the **listing of 'value pairs'**. Every participant was asked to mention positive values, which they are proud of and core problems. After collecting the items, they were categorised according to what could be changed (individually or together). Following pooling the problems highlighted by individuals, the items were grouped by their incidence and the probability of finding a solution. Participants were asked how they could improve their situation and what they needed to achieve that.

The common conclusion of the local meetings was that it is important and feasible to involve the local Roma community in the community planning, local project development activities. This was finally defined as the main goal of the local LERI research in the localities. The local people also acknowledged implementation risks. Namely, if the local LERI research is successful in the sense of motivating the local community, it could lead to further frustration among locals because they might start believing that their ideas can come true, their plans can be implemented and they can make their voices heard, which may not always be possible in the future.

After the forums, the LERI field expert consulted the mayors of the three localities who were satisfied with the results.

*"I did not believe that they could be involved in such a way. It is very promising. I am curious until when they will stay motivated."*<sup>4</sup>

Another risk could be that if the local actors were motivated and had their hopes raised about opportunities for funding and support for local initiatives, only to find the funds were not ultimately available, the project could be rather harmful.

Participants of the meetings were interested in finding out about successful (or good practice) Roma inclusion projects in other settlements to get ideas to adapt to their villages. Finally, **study trips** were designed with this aim in mind. This was the first opportunity for most people to leave their county. It was also hoped that study trips could maintain participants' motivation and provide opportunities to learn basic organisational skills because the local community was expected to organise these trips by themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> Mayor of Csányosrő, 6 November 2015, personal interview.

Following the meetings, the LERI field expert summarised the results in the needs assessment report in August 2015. The situation in the three villages can be summarised in the following way: local people were generally very disappointed with regard to local development projects promising economic growth, they lack the motivation and skills to express their needs and access to financial resources is very limited. The needs assessment pinpointed that: i) according to the local mayors and representatives, the lack of access to the rural development funds is due to a badly managed allocation system of EU funds in Hungary; ii) the local Roma community (especially, people of low social status) are often excluded from decision-making at local level; and iii) Roma people are accustomed to their opinion not being taken into account.

Based upon the positive experiences of the preparatory phase, the LERI field expert proposed to continue using the methods listed above also during the implementation phase. This plan was negotiated with the three mayors and approved by them (in the presence of the regional LERI coordinator) in autumn 2015. So the implementation phase brought about further citizen forums, consultations – including community visioning sessions – and study trips.

The aim of the **citizen forums during the implementation phase** was to mobilise a broader group of local inhabitants and help those who usually have passive role in the local community to better articulate their needs and preferences.

The applied methods involved drama methods and open discussions. Notes were put on a flipchart, minutes of the meeting were prepared by local LERI co-researchers who, that way, also had the opportunity to learn from the LERI field expert how to facilitate such meetings. It was useful to select the concrete techniques to be used before the meetings, based on the number of participants and their activities.

The topics of the forums included the continuation of mapping local values and preparing a virtual marketing strategy for the villages, and defining the strategic direction and goals for the Local Equality Plans (LEPs) in Besence. The LEP is a compulsory document for every Hungarian settlement and also a precondition to access EU development funds. In addition, there were also project development meetings at the local level based upon the ideas that emerged during the meetings in the LERI needs assessment phase. The LEP in Besence was discussed and finally approved also by a local forum.

The LERI field expert also organised **citizens' consultations** for key and secondary local stakeholders. The aim of these consultations was to focus on setting up the LERI research steering committee that, according to the LERI LPP, was meant to be in charge of running the local development projects in the future. Participants of the group discussions included the mayors, local co-researchers and other local stakeholders. The goal of the meetings was to validate the findings and ideas generated at the citizens' forums and to incorporate these into the local projects. This method was employed to formalise the review procedure of the local findings and to approve the development documents produced.

The LERI field expert also reached out to the broader local population, including not just the local stakeholders but also the local inhabitants, by organising **community visioning sessions**. The aim of this was to provide input for the long-term development plans that would then lead to the actions of the LEP and to development of the market strategy of Okormente Ltd (the company run by the municipality of Besence). During these sessions the LERI field expert was basically relying on open brainstorming combined with performative action research methods. These techniques are similar to those of the village marketing negotiation mentioned above.

Finally, as part of the local LERI research the local LERI co-researcher from Besence planned and organised **study trips** to settlements with relevant benchmarking activities. The goal of this activity was to find out about initiatives implemented in other settlements, and to start thinking about new projects and methods. The mayor of Besence (LERI co-researcher in Besence) proposed a three-day study tour for 15 persons (five per participating locality) to other LERI research villages. The decision criteria on where to go included the feasibility and sustainability of development projects observed and the similarity of the characteristics of the benchmark villages. Consequently, settlements with relevant agricultural and free-time activities were favoured. According to the original plan, study trips were to be organised by the local communities themselves using a 'project method' (e.g. division of individual tasks, communication with the hosts, timing, budget planning, selection of participants, follow-up, etc.). The study trip was chosen as an activity because of the strong recommendation of the mayor of Besence.

All these PAR techniques were proposed by the LERI field expert based on his experience using these methods in settlements similar to the participating ones here in the LERI research.

## Ethical considerations associated with the proposed LERI implementation plan and activities emerging in the needs assessment phase

One of the LERI field expert's ethical concerns was linked to the potential consequences of the successful engagement of the Roma community in local affairs. As the mayor of Besence stated at the beginning of the project,

*"if local people express their needs, somebody will have to answer them. Even after the LERI research ends locally, the local leaders will still be in the localities with no guarantee of being able to meet all the expectations expressed in the long term."*

Given the LERI research's short time frame and also limited investment opportunities, in the LERI field expert's view the local actions had to be conducted carefully, ensuring clear communication of the feasible results of the LERI research's aims (see kick off meetings in 2015) and involving extensive consultation with the mayors, especially in the case of Besence. It was important to manage the local expectations via community discussions, and documenting all the views expressed. The LERI field expert put effort into avoiding generating unrealistic expectations, and into understanding the potential of the LERI research.

Local actions (meetings, events) started with the presentation of the relevant information (decisions, events, milestones) about the research. The allocation of a LERI local fund was officially public and the LERI field expert informed each of the communities about the aim of the fund and the allocations dedicated to the involved settlements. However, it was unfortunate that information on the final allocations was not published in Besence at the end of the local LERI activities – despite repeated requests made by the LERI field expert.

The composition of the local LERI teams was also communicated to the local participants, who were also encouraged to contact any of them. The LERI field expert shared his phone number and email address and a local Facebook group was also formed in Besence. Unfortunately, none of the local inhabitants approached the LERI field expert with any questions.

Another ethical issue was about the use of personal data collected. In this respect, the LERI field expert paid outstanding attention to assure the participants that no documentation or audio-visual recordings would be generated without their permission. The LERI field expert and the LERI co-researchers followed the main data protection principles set out in the research's communication guidelines. As a matter of fact, no photos were taken or recordings made without information being shared in advance on the objective and without the approval of the participants.

## 4. The local intervention description

As a result of the LERI needs assessment, the following activities were identified as potential objectives for the LERI research in Besence and in the partner localities:

1. developing and adapting local income generation projects;
2. developing project ideas for community-based projects;
3. developing the human capacity of the local actors and developing the capacity and the mid-term sustainability strategy of the municipality-owned company (Okormente Ltd) in Besence;
4. updating the LEP of the three villages involved.

At the beginning of the local LERI research implementation phase, local stakeholders uniformly agreed to update the LEPs as a priority because in 2015 this became a precondition to accessing EU development funds. The planned activities in harmony with the participatory approach used during the previous LERI phases supported the community-based planning instead of entrusting this to an external 'expert' who would prepare the plans without the involvement of the local inhabitants (otherwise the usual practice in Hungary).

Secondly, they also decided that local Roma communities had to be strengthened and developed. All the mayors seemed to be open for partnership, though it was clear that the communities were not prepared for it. For instance, in Csányoszró, there was no formal leader within the community and the people were very unmotivated. Those in Vajszló did not have any significant experience in project development and management or cooperation between the local Roma and non-Roma leaders. While the local Roma community had a formal leader (the president of the National Roma Self-Government, hereinafter referred to as

NRSG), she had no experience in community planning. The NRSG was elected in October 2014, but members had no significant support from the Roma community or experience in community development. For this reason, capacity- and team-building activities were incorporated into local LERI activities. So, the local actors (mayors, representatives of the local communities) agreed that local LERI research should focus on the capacity building and motivation of the local (Roma) community.

While finalising the aim and the content of the local LERI research, some specific – sometimes very personal – issues emerged in the villages involved.

**Besence:** Some conflicts occurred in the local community between the workers of Okormente Ltd because of personal reasons and due to factors such as the selection of public workers and contract lengths, basically because of the share of employment offered by Okormente Ltd. These conflicts influenced the operation and efficiency of the agricultural project and there was a concern that the local LERI activities would be affected as well. At the beginning of June 2015 a typical conflict (personal debate on public work – who would be employed in the programme from the following month) occurred between two families, and it was therefore concluded that local LERI research should incorporate a conflict management and resolution element as a specific PAR method (team building and communication courses).

In addition to this, the mayor of Besence had a good relationship with the Liberal Party.<sup>5</sup> Having experience with using his active political role and consequent media appearances, he admitted that he considered LERI research – and any local actions – partly also as additional activities to boost his and the village's media publicity.

**Csányosrzó:** The mayor was elected in October 2014, without any experience of leading a municipality. He needed a local Roma partner and support from the Roma community. The local LERI co-researcher works in the municipality coordinating the work of the public employees. There were just few Roma families (around 20) who were open to the agricultural project transferred from Besence, but the local opponents of the mayor obstructed the scaling-up of the existing agricultural activity.

**Vajszló:** The mayor of Vajszló first suggested focusing the local LERI activities on reopening and revitalising the recently closed wood factory (owned by him). This could have met the local community's intention to develop a project providing employment for local people, however the mayor could not provide detailed financial and legal information on the factory and his enterprise, so they finally dropped the idea.

The local LERI research was launched in all three settlements in autumn 2015. For an overview of the local LERI goals, activities run and PAR methods applied, see table below.

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<sup>5</sup> The Liberal Party managed to get one member elected to Parliament in 2014, through the cooperation of several small opposition parties.

**Table 1. Main goals of the implementation process**

Goals	Activities	PAR methods
Local inhabitants become more involved and active	Public discussions using PAR technique	Recruitment of participants with assistance of co-researchers, community discussions
New ideas from the inhabitants to solve the problems identified in needs assessment phase	Capacity building	Training, study trips
	Community planning	Drama methods and Brainstorming Citizens' forum and consultation
	Project development	Community-based project planning

Source: LERI field expert, 2016

The expected impact of the local LERI research project was to better mobilise local communities in all three municipalities by stimulating their more active involvement in the community planning and by improving their communication skills.

### Changes and justifications: Micro-regional cooperation, adaptation of the 'Besence model'

During the local LERI research project's implementation phase, the mayors of Csányoszró and Vajszló finally decided to develop their own independent public work projects. To this end, Csányoszró's tender was successful within the Start Model programme (funding awarded). In addition to this agricultural programme, they were also starting a cement-module factory. In Vajszló, they decided to run their own paprika production, and they also started marketing the products in 2016.

Consequently, some changes were introduced to the local LERI research project in all the settlements:

Besence kept on devising its own economic development strategy with the aim of further developing local agricultural production and supporting the independent agricultural production of public workers currently involved in the programme, through creating a local development fund.

The local community in Csányoszró started a small-scale agricultural project (chicken breeding), with the long-term goal of involving a growing number of people within the community.

The local community in Vajszló decided to launch a free-time micro-project, mostly for women. First they opted for a Zumba dance course, however, lacking an instructor, they changed this to a Roma dance course.

Because of the division of the LERI local fund among the three settlements, the mayor of Besence suggested that should participants from the other two

localities join the study trip, their costs should be financed from their respective part of the LERI local fund – otherwise only local people from Besence could participate.<sup>6</sup>

The original LERI idea defined in the LPP was to develop the local horticulture project and adapt it in the two villages. Due to changing priorities in Vajszló and Csányoszló to develop their public work-based agriculture projects in their own way, however, the local LERI research project changed. Taking into consideration these changes, the logic of the activities had to be modified.

While the local LERI research was still focused on local strategy planning with low or formal involvement of the local people in Besence, the other two villages and teams enjoyed greater independence from the local power structure. That is, the participants in Vajszló and Csányoszló could plan their local LERI activities in a more participative way. This difference was reflected in the evaluation process when seeking evidence of the local people being able to plan and implement demand-based, small-scale projects without the close control of formal leaders. The local settings in the three villages differ in the following ways.

*Besence:* Local LERI research project was organised and controlled by the mayor (LERI co-researcher for Besence), the local inhabitants were present at the meetings but did not take an active part in the decision-making.

*Csányoszló:* The local mayor also had a central position in the discussions, but the local people could and did really effect the implementation of the local LERI research project and made the ultimate decisions on their own.

*Vajszló:* The local leaders, despite the municipality being present at the community meetings, did not influence the decisions and were interested in increasing the autonomy of the local Roma community – even though they did not believe, the community would be able to implement large-scale local projects in the short-term.

## Explanation for the changes in the general goals of the project (micro-regional cooperation)<sup>7</sup>

The mayors of Csányoszló and Vajszló considered their agricultural activity as successful without the close cooperation with Besence. They have been able to grow the vegetables in their greenhouses and their own expert provided the technological support. They found it was easier to sell the produce independently and that the price was not lower than when doing the marketing together. That is, they had to find another meaningful activity for the local LERI research. There was no conflict between the mayors because of their withdrawal from the planned micro-regional cooperation. The mayor of Csányoszló did not believe that the proposed close cooperation would have had the benefit anticipated at the beginning of the local LERI research project.

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<sup>6</sup> First trip was on 18 May, the next was planned to take place on 9 June but did not take place until the end of the project period.

<sup>7</sup> This section is based on the interviews of the Evaluation phase (recorded on 11–12 August, 2016).

The mayor of Besence evaluated this change as the local projects (in Csányoszló and Vajszló) followed the model of Besence in 2016 but achieved a level of farming independency earlier than expected. There was another reason why the closer cooperation did not happen in Csányoszló: as the mayor said,

*"The more experienced local farmers of the village are reluctant to learn from Besence, or have a close partnership because of their pride and self-respect."*

All agricultural activities are running independently in 2016.

## Implemented local activities

### **Study trip (organisation, destination, settlements, aim and feasibility study)**

According to the original plan, 15 members (five from each of the three villages) were to participate in a study trip to visit few locations (among them LERI research venues abroad) for several days.

Since close cooperation among the three settlements had been dropped from the goals, a joint study trip no longer made sense. In addition, both Csányoszló and Vajszló were allocated €1,000 each from their LERI local fund to finance their smaller projects independently. In view of this, the mayor of Besence requested that only residents from Besence take part in the study trip; if anyone wanted to join from the other two settlements they had to finance this from their own part of the LERI local fund.

The length of the trip was shortened to a single day: the mayor assumed people would not want to be away for longer time because many have children and they also need to take care of their animals. By shortening the trip, however, it became possible for 30 people to participate instead of the original 15. The LERI field expert asked the local residents what they thought about a longer trip and, indeed, there were some women who would have declined to participate, especially since they had had no similar experience before. The LERI field expert then suggested that there should be two groups: one would take a one-day trip somewhere in the region, while another smaller group could set out for longer, as had been originally planned. The mayor rejected this option, stating there would be no interest. Expenses for the study trip had been allocated to the mayor's (local LERI co-researcher) contract with the regional LERI coordinator (BIPA) and therefore the LERI field expert had no room for any further manoeuvres or negotiations here.

The destination of the study trip was subject to change several times. The mayor proposed a city with a similar product (onions), and so Makó (in the south of Hungary) seemed a good option, with an additional leisure-time activity in nearby Ópusztaszer (National Memorial Park). But then this was changed due to the rationale that the trip could be linked to cabbage marketing in Tiszkácske, because

*"the buyers could talk about their quality expectations to the participants of the trip, and they could learn a lot from this."<sup>8</sup>*

These modifications (both the method and the change of the programme) can be considered as characteristic of the implementation of the local LERI research in Besence and the entire decision-making process.

The first trip was implemented: to Tiszakécske on 18 May 2016 with 15 participants. The second trip was postponed many times and then did not happen until the end of the local LERI research implementation period.

### **Community programmes in Csányoszló and Vajszló**

As mentioned above, local LERI activities were redesigned several times in both Vajszló and Csányoszló. There were objective and external reasons for this.

The original plan for a Zumba club in Vajszló was agreed and the active members of the local team (4–5 women) started organising this, but they could not find a Zumba instructor in the region. The only instructor was already fully booked. At this point, the local LERI team decided to hire somebody from Pécs (35 km away), however, with poor public transport nobody was willing to commute. The LERI field expert and the regional LERI coordinator's staff tried to help through their networks, but without any success. Realising that there was no Zumba instructor available, they changed the activity to a Roma dance club, which started on 29 April 2016, the last session being held in August 2016.

The original plan for an agricultural project in Csányoszló was a horticultural greenhouse project. The local LERI team was very committed to this activity, however, in early 2016 the local municipality was informed that their proposal for the Start Model programme (extended public work programme) had been approved and so a larger-scale project would soon start with the same profile. As a result, it was reasonable to change the focus of the local LERI research in this village. They decided to involve poor families in breeding chickens. The chickens were delivered to the families' houses on 9 May 2016.

### **Activities and involvement of the local inhabitants in the three settlements**

#### Besence

Facing the fact that micro-regional cooperation would not take place, the local mayor informed the LERI field expert that local activity would focus on the development and updating of the Local Economic Strategy (LES) and the Local Equality Plan (LEP). These were developed in a series of meetings facilitated by an outside expert between May 2015 and March 2016. Six meetings were held in the implementation period.

The update of the LES was finished in April 2016 with a presentation held by the outside expert. Four new fields were defined:

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<sup>8</sup> Mayor of Besence, in the preparatory phase of the study trip (February 2016), male, Roma, personal interview.

- scholarships for higher education and vocational education for the students of elementary and secondary schools;
- funding for adults who attend vocational training;
- enhancement and improvement of the local healthcare infrastructure (in cooperation with the neighbouring villages);
- funding for micro-enterprise (horticulture) development.

The Local Economic Development Strategy was developed in parallel with the updating of the LEP. The two documents were presented on 12 May 2016 at a public meeting in which outside experts also took part (leader of regional labour office, representative of the state-run vocational centre, representative of the state-run enterprise development centre). Their participation was rather symbolic because they left the event before they could comment on the ideas presented.

The local community was only partly involved in the development process. The organisational background of this local LERI activity (communication, timing and facilitation) was not well organised and only the public workers could take part in the meetings.

The LERI field expert interviewed some other local inhabitants about why they did not take part. One member of the municipality (who was very active at the public meeting on 12 May 2016) answered that although she lives in the village and works part-time in the local library, so she could have taken part, was not informed about the meetings. Another member pointed out that:

*"I am not a public worker. I believed that it was exclusively for them."<sup>9</sup>*

Despite several suggestions from the LERI field expert to invite all local inhabitants (possible because of the size of the village), the mayor (leading the process as local LERI co-researcher) was sceptical about the efficacy of meeting outside of working hours and refused to change his approach.

The other obstacle to involvement was the method used. The facilitator of the meeting prepared long and barely comprehensible presentations. In the LERI field expert's view, both the language and the logic were too complicated and unfamiliar for the audience, even though they were open to cooperating.

Experiencing the passivity of the participants before, the LERI field expert asked the facilitator to use methods other than presentation, e.g. questions and voting. This was agreed for the next meeting – however, it was clear that facilitator did not have experience with these techniques.

To develop a priority list, during the meeting four groups were formed and they had to identify problems and prioritise them. As a result of the meeting four priority lists were produced based upon the presentation of the groups. It was

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<sup>9</sup> Member of the local assembly (self-government) following the public hearing held on 12 May 2016, female, non-Roma, personal interview.

not explained how the separate lists would be merged. The expert promised to do this after the meeting.

The expert gave a presentation on the dilemma of the 'tragedy of the anti-commons' and participants had to find a common solution. Although, they understood the problem, in the setting of the workshop – the exercise followed a long presentation, close to lunchtime, with too many people in a small room, and very different participant skill levels – the cooperative work was not successful. The expert's argument for the use of this exercise was that the LERI field expert proposed more interactive and inclusive methods in the meetings.

The Local Economic Plan was presented at a public meeting (5 December 2015). The plan had general aims and objectives (18 pages in total but the proposal part took two pages). The LERI field expert proposed that the mayor elaborate a much more detailed procedure because local people would be able to decide on a proposal with clear conditions instead of general aims ('local development fund should be set up', 'marketable professions for the youngsters should be funded'). This was rejected with the argument that this activity has to follow the decision on strategy.

Finally, the open planning meeting with the local habitants on the regulation of the local development fund was held on 27 July 2016 facilitated by the LERI field expert using PAR methods (drama).

The final evaluation was based on interviews undertaken by the LERI field expert on 11–12 August 2016.

### Csányoszó

The community planning activities defined in the LERI LPP were undertaken between June and December 2015. The local community decided (December 2015) to install a greenhouse for growing vegetables. Plants were to have been shared between the participants of this local LERI activity (five families) and other inhabitants to motivate them for subsequent economic activity. The LERI field expert visited the community many times in late winter and spring 2016 to support the planning activity, and the local mayor also participated in these meetings. The local LERI co-researcher informed the team in January that the extended (Start Model programme) public work programme application had been successful and the plan to install the greenhouse lost its relevance. In February, the members decided to breed chickens instead of growing vegetables.

The local LERI stakeholders approved this change and five local women started preparing the procurement of chickens, collecting bids from neighbouring farmers. Ultimately, the chickens (350) were housed in one courtyard rather than at the five participants' houses because they considered this to be more secure than leaving the chickens open to greater risk across a number of locations.

The LERI field expert had meetings with the participants at this time. The most important issue to discuss was the 'community aspect of the local LERI activity'. The participants said that the ultimate aim of the activity was to motivate the other – Roma – inhabitants to join it, thereby combating the lack of motivation. For this aim, two community events were organised. On 10 June they invited the

public workers (50 persons) for lunch, preparing 50 chickens and another 50 were offered for an alternative event – held on 7 July – for the opening ceremony of the extended public work programme.

The chicken breeding continued after the local LERI research project implementation period with around 50 chickens. Around 200 animals was offered for the local community and cooked on village days and around 100 were sold. As the mayor stated, the small-scale project could be considered as a partly successful pilot because the participants organised the procurement and made decisions on the activity. This was an experience that showed they could undertake activities alone, not linked to the public work programme. Nevertheless, he also pointed out that

*"it could give me an idea to develop a bigger-scale chicken-breeding project – a pet-food factory. We will apply for funding for this project"<sup>10</sup>*

Following the first meeting with a large number of participants, the core of the active community worked together efficiently. They met the LERI field expert regularly and the discussions were productive. The local mayor also took an active part in the meetings and sometimes tried to influence the decision-making. When the LERI field expert suggested him not to pressure the participants, he usually answered:

*"OK, this is not my field. The decision has to be made by you (participants), I will not push you."<sup>11</sup>*

### Vajszló

The launch of the local LERI research project in this settlement was the most complicated. Following three unsuccessful attempts, five community planning events were organised between June and December 2015. The new local LERI co-researcher (see section on Changes and justifications) was able to approach and involve the local Roma women better and her official position as leader of the local RMSG made it possible to involve two representative of the local municipality.

As a result of the planning meetings, the participants decided on a Zumba club for women. However, despite the support of the LERI field expert, an instructor could not be found, so finally they decided to run a Roma dance club between May and August. They did not lose their motivation following a series of disappointments over engaging a Zumba instructor and changed the local LERI activity – which was a significant compromise compared to the original idea. The Roma dance club ran on a bi-weekly basis with 15–16 participants (mainly children).

The LERI research project activity in Vajszló was designed as a small-scale free-time activity. Despite the size of the project, and the level of involvement and cooperation of the local community, this was considered a success because the

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<sup>10</sup> Evaluation interview, mayor of Csányosrő, 11 August 2016, male, personal interview.

<sup>11</sup> Mayor of Csányosrő, December 2015, male, community meeting (notes).

local team formed following a long period where their efforts had been frustrated, and they organised a club for women.

### **Monitoring and evaluation of the local LERI research project**

The LERI field expert involved the regional LERI coordinator (BIPA) and the local LERI co-researchers in the design of the evaluation, discussing the methods and questions for the interviews. The three mayors and two local LERI co-researchers were interviewed individually, and three focus groups were organised with 27 participants.

The evaluation took place on 11–12 August 2016. Although, the evaluation was planned to run following the completion of all local LERI research project activities defined in the LERI LPP, some of them had not taken place by this date (one of the study trips from Besence and the third community event in Csányosr6).

The evaluation focused on the opinions of the local actors and the local inhabitants who had not taken part in the local LERI research project – actively focusing on the reasons for their absence and the benefits of the LERI ‘products’ from their perspective. The evaluation was built around focus groups and individual interviews with the local inhabitants, focusing on the following topics:

- what their observations and impression of the meetings were;
- whether it was really community-based planning and how it could be more inclusive;
- what the obstacles to more active participation of the local inhabitants were;
- which community-based planning methods could be used, and how;
- what their perceptions of the actors of the LERI research were.

## **5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned**

### **Relevance of the LERI local project plan**

The LERI local project plan (LPP) was based on the key findings of the LERI needs assessment phase. The micro-regional cooperation aimed to mainstream the Besence model with the involvement of local Roma (and non-Roma) communities using PAR methods. As the final evaluation of the programme shows, cooperation between the settlements of the micro-region is an existing and relevant goal, but rather for larger-scale projects. Public work-based programmes run in every village but none of the mayors believe that these programmes can improve the economic situation within the existing regulations. At the beginning of the local LERI research project, the mayors declared that the public work programme in Besence could be considered a model and they were open to its adaptation. However, while initially attractive, the two villages eventually decided to operate their programmes independently.

Nevertheless, micro-regional cooperation makes sense in other fields. As the local mayors stated, both the appearance of commercial investors and the larger-scale EU funding for economic development can hopefully be accessed through joint efforts. During the LERI period, 10 villages established a single-issue

association for the promotion of local economic opportunities. Notably, this was not the result of local LERI research project.

Besides this joint effort, during the evaluation the mayors pointed at the key role of the local representatives of the ruling party (Fidesz) in development issues.

*"We need to have to have a good relationship with them, which can be maintained with good personal contact rather than with wide-ranging partnerships."*<sup>12</sup>

The LERI LPP found a relevant method and goal but the local activities were faster and the adaptation of the local horticulture programme was completed before the end of LERI implementation period.

## Relevance of the involvement of the local inhabitants

The core question of the local LERI research was how the local communities could be involved in collaborative planning and strategy making. The relevance of this goal was proved: where the involvement was unsuccessful, the 'products' of the local LERI research seem to face sustainability problems following its closure. Generally the PAR method-based involvement was not used to the extent planned, and the final local LERI activities in the three villages varied a lot with respect to methods used.

Despite the disagreement with the mayor of Besence around the efficacy of the PAR methods, the outcomes and activities of the local LERI research were at the end either defined by or discussed with the local community using participatory techniques. The main product of the LERI research in Besence is a widely approved 'development package' that was ultimately a consultative outcome at the local level.

In Csányosrő only five local women took active part in the local chicken-breeding activity, because the other members of local community did not consider this to be attractive. Therefore the local LERI activity here is not a real community-based initiative involving a significant number of the local Roma, and its sustainability is questionable. Nevertheless, the local mayor found this activity to be appropriate on which to build the later public work programme with the aim of economic sustainability establishing a local factory.

The dance club LERI activity in Vajszlő was the least successful with respect to sustainability, community engagement and economic effect. The participants of this activity were not able to involve a broad set of local people, despite their large efforts. Furthermore, the support and participation of the local mayor in this settlement was the weakest from among the three settlements .

The belief of local leaders in the involvement of local people in the development process wavered. The mayors supported the idea at the beginning but constantly voiced their scepticism after implementation on local LERI activities has started. Ultimately, the opinion of the mayor of Besence changed to a more supportive

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<sup>12</sup> Mayor from the micro-region, August 2016, male, informal discussion.

attitude. It can be concluded that the successful involvement of the Roma inhabitants was due to the following factors:

- the status of local community;
- the open attitude of the local mayor and leaders;
- the important supporting function and availability (even if delayed) of the LERI local fund;
- the relevance and therefore importance of the local LERI activities to the inhabitants.

All of these factors can be considered as crucial for the effectiveness of genuine involvement. If any were missing, the local initiatives could turn to be less successful.

## Challenges of the implementation

### **Low motivation of local residents**

While this risk was identified as the most critical one, an effective solution was not found. Relatively high participation rates at meetings in **Besence** were achieved through the local public workers' 'compulsory participation': the mayor, who is in fact their employer, made participation obligatory for public workers. In addition, meetings were organised during working hours that also guaranteed their participation, notably contrary to those residents who had jobs outside of the village (and who are not so dependent on the local authority.) This solution improved local participation, but it cannot be presented as a good practice, still.

The LERI field expert suggested to invite local residents for meetings outside of working hours. The mayor's (LERI co-researcher leading the LERI activities in Besence) usual answer was that:

*"Local residents would not come to the meetings anyway, and that the majority of the village is made up of public workers, and so it does not make sense to change this routine for the sake of some uncertain participants, especially when a high participation rate can be guaranteed this way."<sup>13</sup>*

Our experience in **Csányoszró** was the exact opposite to Besence. Following the mayor's request, the first meeting was organised during working hours, and similarly all those in attendance were public workers – their participation was compulsory like in Besence. The LERI field expert again suggested that future meetings be organised outside of working hours, and that participation should be voluntary. The mayor here honoured the request, noting however that attendance would be likely to drop significantly. This indeed happened, as the number of those attending the next meeting (on 25 July 2015) fell considerably. However, all seven inhabitants who came have been active participants in the local LERI activities ever since. Considering the high dropout rate and the reasons, the most important goal in the local LERI research project shifted towards involving an ever-widening circle of participants, and motivating local families.

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<sup>13</sup> Co-researcher/mayor of Besence, February 2016, male, Roma, personal interview.

In short, low motivation does indeed present an obstacle to carrying out a project and in involving more participants. It has also been proven, however, that compulsory participation is not necessary to start a development project, albeit this goes at the costs of a smaller group of participants.

This experience was also confirmed in **Vajszló**. Here, from the very start of the local LERI research project, we tried to involve the Roma inhabitants of the village through their local community leaders, instead of focusing only on public workers. Local LERI co-researcher's efforts (there was a personnel change in winter 2015), however, to involve the local population was rather ineffective until winter 2015: at the four meetings organised, only three to four people turned up. The real turning point may have been when the new local LERI co-researcher (the leader of the local Roma government) signed the LERI local fund agreement, so she could now approach residents with the assurance that they *"would have the money for the project"*. At the meeting on 16 November 2016, about 25 people turned up, among them a person from the municipality (who has been active at subsequent meetings, as well), and the kindergarten manager. About 10 of the local Roma women and girls also attended.

Although at this first forum they openly spoke about what they saw as the main problems in the settlement (which for them was the absence of free-time activities and facilities for young people), they did not come to subsequent meetings. According to the local LERI co-researchers, this was no surprise: they thought that the LERI local fund would be evenly distributed between them and they did not want to organise any activities themselves. At the same time, an active group of six to seven women in Vajszló remained, who went on to run the dance club.

It is clear and has to be highlighted once more that the **implementation of PAR-based activities that increase the self-esteem of local people are crucial**.

### **Weak trust and minimal efforts of cooperation from the mayors and stakeholders at the partner settlements (Csányoszló, Vajszló)**

Initially, the stated goal of the local LERI research project was 'adaptation of the Besence model' in the other two settlements involved. Despite the fact that even during the FRA's visit all three mayors emphasised the importance of cooperation the mayors of Csányoszló and Vajszló later indicated that they would rather run their own independent, public work-based agricultural projects and this objective was removed from the amended LERI LPP.

According to the mayor of Csányoszló, local farmers did not want closer cooperation with Besence because they were afraid that it might hurt their own business interests; they thought they could organise the marketing of their own products as soon as they reached the market volume threshold in production – they did not need close cooperation to achieve this.

In Vajszló, a member of the local government told us informally why they backed out of the cooperation: in 2014, the vegetables grown in Vajszló were marketed through a non-profit organisation from Besence (Okormente Ltd). However, none of the marketing figures have ever been reported back satisfactorily, and so leaders of the Vajszló project were never able to find out how much profit the

organisation actually made. This is why they lost trust in cooperating, and decided to produce and market on their own, even though their technological know-how was far behind that of the Besence team.

The mayor of Vajszló had a less critical opinion of this problem.<sup>14</sup> He did not find Okormente Ltd's operation to be in question. Nevertheless, the direct contact to the companies buying and selling the products was considered less complicated because this way they did not have to synchronise production and technology. He said that though their technological level was lower than Besence's at the beginning of LERI, they could develop it and operate their local horticultural programme without close cooperation with Besence. However, it was emphasised that they received significant support and motivation from the Besence programme in the beginning of their activity (2014–2015).

The opinion of the mayor of Csányosr3 was similar. They started the horticultural activity with the assistance of Besence, but were able to develop their programme and run it independently. Neither required the help of Besence for the marketing but they sell their products to largely the same factories. The cooperation in selling was 'uncomfortable' because of the different quality of products and harvesting periods.

Regardless of the lack of close cooperation within local LERI research, 10 neighbouring villages established association for local economic development. The aim of this organisation is to apply for government funding (a rural development fund) to build a cold storage with which the local agricultural programmes will be more efficient.

Both the mayor of Vajszló and of Csányosr3 stated<sup>15</sup> that horticultural programmes – even those that are managed well and can be considered successful – cannot provide the ultimate solution for the economic depression of the micro-region due to their small-scale nature. The solution for the economic crisis can, however, be found in two ways: diversification of the economy and the presence of outside investors.

For this reason, the municipality of Csányosr3 expanded the local public work programme with a concrete-brick factory (opened in summer, 2016) and started negotiations with Sellye municipality (a neighbouring small town) to join their industrial park initiative. Another idea of the mayor is to build a local poultry slaughterhouse, where the local farmers could sell. This factory would be complemented with a pet-food factory to widen its capacity and efficiency.

The mayor of Vajszló also has high expectations about the rural development funds (from the EU and the government). He stated that only larger-scale investments could improve the economic situation,

*"Long-term, reliable, for-profit type employment can improve the living standards."*

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<sup>14</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Mayor\_Vajszló', 08.11.2016, male, non-Roma, personal interview.

<sup>15</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Mayor\_Vajszló', 08.11.2016, male, non-Roma, personal interview.

All three mayors continue to be interested in public work programmes, but they are very critical about their regulation. As the mayors said, the **local public work programmes could be much more efficient were the regulations more flexible**. Programmes cannot provide opportunities for the differentiation of salaries based on individual activity, meaning employees cannot be motivated and developed if everybody has the same salary. Another problem of the programme is that employees must not work on private properties. This means that abandoned houses and lands cannot be renewed, nor can the properties of vulnerable people.

### **Role and position of Besence's mayor in his community**

The role and position of Besence's mayor impacted on the local LERI research project more than anything else. Even though during its introductory phase (and at personal encounters) the mayor seemed open to community building and to democratic communication methods, his actual conduct during the implementation phase put this impression into serious doubt.

Decision-making appeared to be done with the full participation of the local community – their participation however amounted to nothing more than sheer physical presence much of the time.

The mayor has a clear vision for every issue and makes this very clear when it comes to decision-making; and so everyone simply followed his proposals without any substantive criticism or offering suggestions. This happened at development meetings with LERI teams as well as with local municipality assemblies (e.g. community meetings). This does not manifest in power-wielding or aggressive communication; it simply refers to the fact that the mayor's communication skills, background knowledge, and especially his ability to 'perform' formal elements of the democratic process are considerably further than those of the local community.

In addition, public workers (the local LERI research target group) are in fact financially dependent on the mayor. The same is partially true for relations within the municipality, where, for example, one of the members is the village trustee, who is employed by the municipality, and another member is an employee of the municipality's non-profit organisation. This does not mean that the mayor abuses his formal or informal power – this was not experienced in LERI research implementation, at least. Rather, it could be considered an obstacle should local people have a different opinion.

Despite the fact that the **mayor has an unavoidable role in the local community, local people do not find this problematic**. As the former mayor of Besence stated in the evaluation interview, the decision of the local people at the election was good because

*"Józsi has better skills than I had. He can manage the village and I do not mind that I had to step down from this position because it was too much for me."*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Participants\_Leaders\_Besence', 08.12.2016, male, Roma, focus-group interview.

The role of the mayor is just partly defined by his formal position; his communication skills afford him a favourable position in any open discussions.

### **Improvisations: refugee camp, Facebook campaign of the petition on public work regulation**

During the evaluation, several participants of the local LERI activities mentioned that it was difficult to follow the mayor's plethora of ideas (both new and modifications of previous ones) that have constantly come up during the implementation. For instance, in autumn 2015 at the height of the refugee crisis in Hungary, the mayor initiated a public discussion on whether the settlement should accommodate refugees in a refugee camp.<sup>17</sup> The initiative was eventually rejected, probably in part because of the lack of preparation for the discussion itself.

An important catalyst in this initiative, as well as in other initiatives (i.e. petitioning the Ministry of Internal Affairs) is the mayor's good relations with the Liberal Party, which may at times drive him to go beyond the framework of local politics. According to the LERI field expert, this political ambition is often limited to symbolic actions, such as those mentioned above, which have little hope of resulting in effective solutions.

Another unexpected turn was when the mayor informed the LERI field expert in January 2016 that he had entrusted another outside expert to run a quantitative survey of the local inhabitants (the public workers). The exact aim of the survey was not clear, nor whether it was part of local LERI research or not. The report on the survey was completed in mid-March 2016. The key conclusions from the report were that local people are more or less satisfied with their living conditions and the local leadership, and do not want to move from their village.

### **Sceptical attitude of the mayor of Besence towards PAR methods**

It was only during the implementation of the local LERI research in autumn–winter 2015 that it became apparent that the mayor disapproved the methods of involvement listed in the LERI LPP and provided by the LERI field expert (drama, community planning, community programmes). He told us:

*"At Autonomia, you may be having fun with these methods, but we don't need them here, I don't believe in them. These people don't need them, they will be useless."<sup>18</sup>*

The LERI field expert reminded the mayor that these methods were included in the LERI LPP and, as such, are part of the contract. Moreover, he would have nothing to lose from utilising them, since if they are indeed unsuccessful, as he assumed they would be that would also be an important lesson from the research, and would indicate a failure of the method, but not of the whole local LERI research project. Nevertheless, the mayor remained hesitant to use PAR methods (or better to say, under the conditions it became impossible to use them).

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<sup>17</sup> <http://abcug.hu/jojienek-csak-legalabb-felelevenitem-a-torok-tudasomat/>

<sup>18</sup> Mayor of Besence, commenting on the result of the 'community planning session' held by the outside expert (February 2016).

The LERI field expert participated in community planning sessions, regardless, to which the mayor, as local LERI co-researcher, invited an expert from the Labour Market Office (his old friend). At the development meetings, the expert told the LERI field expert that the role of facilitator was unfamiliar to him and he could not fulfil it. The development meetings in effect morphed into simple presentations, at the end of which the audience 'unanimously accepted the plans put forward'. The mayor also came to realise that the expert was not suitable for his assigned role, but still did not implement any significant changes in the process, as he thought that the primary aim of this local LERI activity was to generate a local development strategy and to update the Local Equal Opportunity Plan, and he believed that the expert would produce both of these.

Nonetheless, the LERI field expert was still able to employ some PAR methods during the development process in early 2015, during the LERI needs assessment phase, although on only two occasions; the difference in the two facilitating methods in terms of participant involvement was obvious.

Local people were not very open to collaborate in PAR methods presented by the LERI field expert, following the mayor's (LERI co-researcher) scepticism in these methods and his reference to these methods as "games". They all loudly expressed that by saying: "*No, we are not children!*" It was more than challenging for the LERI field expert to create an opportunity to present, explain and introduce these development techniques.

Only in the last phase of the local LERI research project implementation has the mayor agreed that the LERI field expert could facilitate the local meeting on the elaboration of the local development strategy in a participatory way. The aim of the meeting was to define the details of the scholarship and funding programmes with the future target groups. The LERI field expert was able to use a special drama method by setting up a hypothetical framework and inviting participants to simulate the operation of a local development fund. Community member (i.e. potential future applicants) were asked to take the decision-making role, and they had to evaluate applications submitted by other participants/inhabitants and discuss the final decision. Even the least motivated or communicative persons were able to express their opinions in this set up that shows clearly the effectiveness of this method with regard to engagement in an otherwise closed and passive community environment.

Following the meeting, also the mayor admitted that it had been successful and the participants had really taken part in all the activities.

In the evaluation phase, the mayor said that although he did not trust the PAR techniques (again "games" as he called them), he acknowledges that local actors turned more active following this experience. Finally, **they admitted to continue using this open method in community planning in the future**. As a result of local LERI research in Besence, local inhabitants (participants) planned and organised Village Day (13 August, 2016) without any outside support from the mayor. The municipality (practically, the mayor) informed them on the available funding allocated for the event and they planned the programme according to the budget for the day.

## **Communication between the local LERI co-researchers and the LERI field expert**

Due to their respective professions, all three local LERI co-researchers are skilled in online communication and their administrative capacity is also high; yet, documentations and plans were drawn up irregularly, and we repeatedly had to request them to submit written materials.

The documents completed were mostly formal, lacking participants' opinions and personal reflections, even though these would have been more valuable to the project than 'empty' formalities. Following the LERI field expert's broad experience with various projects, it can be safely stated that even with local colleagues in possession of good administrative skills, it seems particularly difficult to include substantive and subjective elements that do not fit the regular form of meeting minutes (i.e. participants, presenter, decision, deadlines), despite their importance for development work, such information would be of much bigger importance than mere formalities.

## **In-depth experience of indicator-based reporting**

Several times during the local LERI research project we encountered the local tendency to consider only its reporting part, and thus document only the 'measurable indicators' defined in the LERI LPP. The importance of indicators is unquestionable; in this research project however, instead of the documentation, it should have been the planning process itself that received special emphasis.

The local LERI co-researcher (the mayor) responded to nearly every remark on the planning process by highlighting that the requested documents had been completed and the study trip fully planned, and so the local LERI activities had been successfully concluded. When the LERI field expert remarked that although this was true, there had been no real community planning sessions, he responded that there had been six such sessions (see the previous section), and the list of participants had been provided.

This attitude is common with nearly **every state- or EU-funded project: those receiving support have been taught to report exclusively on numeric, normative indicators**. At best, they include a couple of generic statements and commonplace claims about the development's impact on the actual target group, the local community.

This tendency has only been strengthened by the fact that these programmes lack any real, professional monitoring and assessment systems; frequently, project supervisors only 'check the project documentation'. That is, the support culture does not include assessment of target-group involvement or analysis of the on-the-ground experience. This indicator-based communication was reinforced by the fact that two local LERI co-researchers worked in a state-run organisation or in the municipality where this approach is prevalent.

## **Procedure of updating the LEPs was coordinated by TKKI (the state-run not-for-profit vocational training company)**

Although the update of all three settlements' Equal Opportunity Plan was included in the LERI LPP as an objective of community planning, it was only realised in Besence. In the other two settlements, the plans were updated

without involving the local community. The LERI co-researcher in Csányoszló informed the LERI field expert on 28 April that

*"I have prepared it because we needed it for an application. The municipality approved it yesterday."<sup>19</sup>*

The situation was no better in Vajszló, because the LEP was updated by an outside expert from a government agency (TTKI, the state-run training and resource centre operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Human Resources).

The mayors considered these plans 'compulsory administration', since their only function was – as the external expert told us at the community meeting in Besence (12 May 2016) – to abide by the regulation that requires local governments to complete such documentation when applying for EU funds.

### **Organisational problems of the LERI research project**

The LERI field expert was instructed to detail the budget and timing of the use of the LERI local fund marking the different phases (needs assessment and LPP implementation). Following the iterative discussions with the local LERI teams, a final version was submitted on 15 April 2015. It was communicated that the local fund could also be used for the LERI needs assessment phase, which used specific PAR methods. The LERI field expert allocated funding for this action but the decision was not made nor the contract during the spring due to the central LERI research decision to provide access to local funds first following the approval of the local implementation plans (LERI LPP, expected not earlier than September 2016<sup>5</sup>). The LERI field expert decided to start the PAR-based needs assessment, and not wait any longer for the approval of the LERI LPP and a budget from the LERI local fund. If the LERI local fund could have been used, local LERI co-researchers could have taken a more intensive role in the work.

There was more than a year between the first visits of national LERI team and the PAR-based needs assessment activity, which meant that some of the findings of the Feasibility Report, the Stakeholder Report prepared in 2015 and the linked desk research were no longer relevant for empowerment, community building, strategic planning at the time of launching the implementation phase one year later. By this time, some local actors had also lost confidence in the project.

Credibility of the LERI research declined in this locality because, while the local actors (mayors, local LERI co-researchers) were involved in the planned allocation of the LERI local fund, the actual launch of the local LERI activities implementation was delayed by several months.

The mayors cooperated with the LERI field expert because of the reputation of the Autonomia Foundation, the NGO he was also representing. This NGO was very active in that region for several years. Concluding the LERI needs assessment phase was a great challenge for the LERI field expert in terms of differentiating the Autonomia Foundation's core activity from the LERI research project since previous activities were primarily demand-driven (e.g. micro-credit

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<sup>19</sup> LERI co-researcher of Csányoszló, March 2016.

programmes with visible, direct results) while LERI seemed to be more supply-driven.

It also became extremely difficult to keep up people's motivation as the official approval process on the use of the LERI local fund was very time consuming and linked to the final approval of the LERI local project plan. To put it bluntly, it was very challenging to run the planned activities and keep to the planned deadlines in the final phase. This partly also explains why there were still changes in the activities and deadlines during the implementation phase. The link between real change in the existing EU-funding system and the activities of LERI research seemed artificial for the local actors. The language and methods used were also both unusual and unrealistic for the local community.

## Efficiency, achievements, results, benefits

The local LERI research project can be considered as partly successful if we look at the indicators. Almost all the indicators mentioned in the LERI LPP were fulfilled in the villages (the updating of LEPs was not carried out in two villages because of the reasons mentioned in earlier section). Nevertheless, the most important part of the local LERI research project, the involvement of local inhabitants using PAR methodology, was rather unsuccessful in Besence, the main location of the local LERI research project.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned reasons, it can be summarised that **PAR methods can be used only by enthusiastic and already engaged actors**. Using PAR methods is much more time consuming than following the usual, formal decision-making methods, and they require special skills on the part of the facilitators, as well.

In addition, all participants have to understand that PAR methods could result in unexpected directions for the formal leaders because they can reveal hidden opinions, tensions and desires. As the mayor of Besence stated,

*"They can decide anything but the municipality and me would have to implement it. It is very easy to invent ideas but the responsibility would be left to me."*<sup>20</sup>

If we concentrate on the real benefits to the local participants, the cases of the local dance club and the chicken breeding are unambiguous, but it is not so clear in the case of a Strategic Plan or Equality Plan. If these plans are not realised in the short-term, the local participants will not see them as beneficial because they will not deliver any concrete outcomes, results for them.<sup>21</sup>

## Heuristic value

The LERI field expert uses PAR (or similar) methods in his ordinary job. The virtue of these methods is clear and there is significant and summarised evidence to argue for their use. Nevertheless, one of the most important experiences is that using these methods means responsibility regarding the whole development

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<sup>20</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Participants\_Besence', 08.12.2016

<sup>21</sup> The LERI field expert proposed to prepare the procedure of the local scholarship and funding for micro-farmers but it was rejected.

process. That is, the local community has to be aware of the goals and steps of the process, and the presence of the field expert has to be continuous during the project period.

LERI is a research project, which cannot be communicated in a comprehensible way for the local people because they are not part of a 'scientific' community, they do not have any scientific ambition or knowledge. As one Besence participant responded,<sup>22</sup>

*"This was useless. We were just talking but there are no new jobs. Please, tell me, what is the benefit of this? When will we have a real job? It was just talking. Leave me alone!"<sup>23</sup>*

If we look at the results and experiences from the local LERI activities to date, the heuristic value of this endeavour is questionable. What can be proved or justified could have been learnt from other similar regional projects in the field.

The frame (design) of the LERI research was another obstacle to the sharing of in-depth experiences because the change in roles of the actors, their reactions to situations, their opinions would have been interesting (heuristic) results for the LERI research project. However, those cannot be presented in the final study because of the sensitivity of the individual information (which is unquestionably an important concern).

### **Evaluation of interactive (PAR) methods**

Local communities in each village were unmotivated and not accustomed to cooperative work.<sup>24</sup> Using drama methods (situations) or designing and implementing small-scale projects are useful methods for changing their usual roles and positions in the local community. This way, they could have experienced a situation in which they were able to express their opinions and, more importantly, had an active role instead of a passive and symbolic one.

**PAR (and interactive) methods can be used only as instruments for longer-term development** when the actors learn how to become implementers instead of being in the 'target-group position'. If participants become able to design and plan projects and start thinking about future goals without any real hope, the project could be considered a successful 'experiment' rather than real development. The dilemma is that this experiment resulted in proportional outcomes compared to the awakening hope.

### **'Indicatorism'**

As presented in the previous part of the study, criticism about the lack of real involvement of the local inhabitants were answered by the formal fulfilment of the indicators defined in the LERI LPP and the contracts. The PAR method cannot (or barely) be defined by 'SMART' indicators that are usual in project management. This is generally true for development work in poverty-stricken Roma communities because **genuine involvement cannot be measured with**

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<sup>22</sup> Evaluation interview, Mayor, August 2016, personal interview.

<sup>23</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Participants\_Besence', 08.12.2016

<sup>24</sup> Working in one group in a public work programme is not 'cooperative work' because although they are in one place and have to work together, decisions are not made by them, they have to work in a rigid hierarchy.

**the usual indicators** (number of participants, number of meetings, pages of manuals, etc.). Working with excluded segregated Roma communities starts with the involvement and motivation of the unmotivated and usually 'invisible' people. These people do not participate in meetings, they do not respond to invitations and if they do attend meetings, do not have an opinion or voice to make heard. However, every community has various strata of motivated persons who can be involved in projects and take part at meetings more easily than the silent and unmotivated sub-groups.

If the task in a project involves the Roma members of the local community and the indicator is the number of participating people, expectations can be fulfilled by the active members but not by the real target group, which stays at home. If the task is generating discussions and voting on common issues, these active people will do it – and the indicator is fulfilled again. The question is whether the involvement was successful or not. There are real people on the attendance sheets, real minutes of the meetings but the majority of the (Roma) society did not take part in these discussions.

Regarding this problem, the local LERI research project in Besence (and neighbouring villages) can be considered successful because the majority of indicators were fulfilled: the number of participants and the written documents can be reported. Nevertheless, some active members of the Besence community were hindered from attending the meetings (which were organised for the public workers exclusively) and the participants of the meetings were not in fact active.

Formally, the planning of the study trip was also community based but members of the community did not take part in the planning in practice. They accepted the proposal of the mayor without the planned community planning (as mentioned in LERI LPP).

The PAR method and standard project management method are incompatible. PAR techniques can enable inactive people to plan projects (even more to express their opinion and needs) but the process of involvement cannot be reported, or evaluated by the usual project methods. Monitoring that is real monitoring instead of evaluation, reporting and investigation could give a credible picture of the development process using PAR methods.

## **Role of the local people**

Lessons learnt regarding the low motivation and weak participation of the local inhabitants can be explained by the following factors.

- **Missing culture of public debates.** Citizens are not involved (this is generally the case regarding the whole of Hungarian society) in the discussions of public issues and decision-making. There are no formal or informal opportunities where decision-makers and citizens meet and communicate in a direct way. The official meetings are usually ignored by the citizens because "*everything is decided already and I do not want to take part in this theatre*". The other problem with these meetings (which was demonstrated perfectly by the public meeting on 12 May 2016) is the formal and artificial language and organisational set-up.
- Despite the main aim of the LERI research, the presentations given by the expert who was trusted by the local mayor were very complicated and

used unfamiliar terms ('conversation of skills', 'SWOT', etc.). These long-winded and complicated (and usually redundant) **presentations were hard to follow and understand** for the audience and they could not respond to them.

- Although, the use of the LERI local fund could have enhanced the motivation and activity of the participants of the development projects, the rules and **operation of the 'small grant' or 'core grant' programmes have to be simple and comprehensible**. Unfortunately, this was achieved only in Csányoszló and Vajszló. In Besence, the local community did not have a 'free fund' to finance a local initiative because the entire fund was allocated (the fee of the LERI co-researcher, study trips and expert fees) in the LERI LPP planning period and the local community could not influence this. **Even small-size funds** covering the expenditures of the local initiatives in a highly flexible way, **can have a motivating effect on the local teams**.
- In spite of the clear communication and invitation, some local people in Vajszló believed that the LERI local fund would be paid directly to them or spent on the costs of a 'Roma Day'. When they realised that it would have to be spent on a community-based and longer-term activity they left the local LERI project. (Five to six young Roma women left the project and another six continued the work.)

### **The role of the LERI field expert**

The original role of the LERI field expert was more active than 'observer and documenter of local events' when the LERI LPP was drafted. Meetings were planned with the collaboration of the LERI field expert who had the relevant experience with the PAR methods listed in the LERI LPP. The LERI field expert accepted the change in his role in the later phase turning more towards facilitations and mediation instead of active collaboration, because it was clear that the original local LERI research could not be implemented in the planned way, against the will of the local mayor of Besence.

The LERI field expert informed the mayor and the regional LERI coordinator (BIPA) in January 2016 that despite the fact that the 'hard indicators' (strategy, LEP, study trip) would be fulfilled, the lack of a PAR methodology could be problematic because those are explicit in the LERI LPP. The LERI field expert accepted the instruction that if the PAR method failed, the study (evaluation) would have to document the reasons and circumstances of this failure. The mayor (LERI co-researcher) asked the LERI field expert to let them add their comments to the study.

The documentation of the local LERI research project in Besence was a completely different task to the development and documentation activity, which lead to a dilemma: the LERI field expert had to handle the information collected in the process confidentially, but the study was not complete without the important – but confidential – detailed information regarding the background of the project and the withdrawal from the more intensive PAR methodology.

### **Role of local LERI co-researchers**

Three local LERI co-researchers were asked to facilitate and assist the local actions of LERI in Besence, Csányoszló and Vajszló. One co-researcher (in Vajszló) resigned from the project because he got a job in a local pub as a

bartender. The leader of the local Roma Minority Self-Government filled his position. She successfully organised the local meetings.

The LERI co-researcher in Besence was at the same its mayor. Having this dual role caused the original concept of local LERI research to significantly change. He did not have a real co-researcher role but he controlled the local LERI actions as mayor. That is, the subject of the research project became the object too.

Each LERI co-researcher had good administrative and organisational skills. This was important because it is not typical that three such skilful Roma actors can be found in three neighbouring villages.

### **Role of the outside expert**

Entrusting an outside expert with facilitating the local development meetings seemed to be a good idea because this helped the LERI field expert to take an observer position in the process. In practice, however, this cooperation did not work. The outside expert complained he was not aware of the nature of the work. He was informed that he would have to compile the strategy and the LEP and present it to the local inhabitants. Prior to taking up the task he was not informed of the need to use PAR methods and could not do this work because he had not the appropriate knowledge, experience or skills.

The expert cooperated with the LERI field expert but the practical co-working was complicated because of the unpredictable communication and weak administrative skills. For instance, the LERI field expert offered to help planning the workshops in advance but this always failed because the LERI field expert was never forwarded the programme or method required for the next meetings.

### **Sustainability (continuation) of local LERI activities**

The municipality of Besence approved the Local Economic Strategy. A steering committee meeting was organised on 16 June 2016 in Pécs to discuss the strategy. As the LERI field expert highlighted, the strategy could not be the subject of a substantive discussion because it just had general aims ('Local economy has to be developed via a local development fund'). The LERI field expert suggested drafting a more detailed plan including the procedural aspects (local inhabitants also needed a copy of the draft strategy) that could be discussed at the public meeting and discussed by the experts of the steering committee. The mayor stuck to the original idea of presenting the existing plan to the committee and elaborating on the procedural details following the meeting. Six experts of the regional organisations took part in the meeting and their opinion was unambiguous: the idea of the **local development fund** was excellent but the details were very important for the discussion. The most important issue was the origin of the fund because the regulation of the local fund had to be defined based upon the various regulations regarding the origin of the resource.

The result of the meeting was that experts were open for further discussion when the details of the regulations of the local development fund were known.

The LERI field expert would have provided any relevant information for the local scholarship system and local development fund, but taking an active part in the

elaboration was not possible because the local inhabitants would not participate in the process, as was planned in the LERI LPP.<sup>25</sup>

The local development fund in Besence will start, as the appropriate funding will be provided. The problem with the funding was as usual: private funding was not available and the centralised funding (either from the EU or the State) was not flexible and could not be used for this aim in 2016. The original idea was that the income of Okormente Ltd would have been the source of the fund but this had to be rejected because of legal reasons. However, the idea should not be rejected fully because taking into consideration the size of the necessary funding, the local municipality may undertake the funding. It is hoped that this local development fund will be continued and launched in 2016 following the local LERI research project period.

Despite the initial reluctance of the mayor of Besence to **use participatory methods**, local people in Besence became more active in organisational tasks. In addition, the mayor said in the evaluation interview that

*"these methods can work, I admit. But it is important that the expert has to be well-experienced and clear goals are also important. If the people know what the aim of these exercises is, they can be of benefit."*<sup>26</sup>

Local LERI research project did not result in a close micro-regional cooperation, however, the cooperation started in different ways and through different initiatives (a newly established development association) and the local agricultural programmes reached the planned level. The first impulse or motivation was from Besence, but the other two villages became independent sooner than planned.

This phenomenon seems to be continuing after the end of local LERI research project: Another small village, Bogdása, recently started a similar horticulture project based on the experience of Besence. They have close cooperation with Besence's Okormente Ltd, which provides consultancy and marketing support for the local project. As the mayor of Besence said,

*"I do not expect a long cooperation having experienced LERI but I do not mind it. They just started it and will follow their way when they reach the level of development. The most important fact that they use the public work programme in a meaningful way, regardless of the bad regulation."*<sup>27</sup>

The sustainability of the **chicken-breeding project** in Csányoszró is doubtful. The local mayor said<sup>28</sup> that he strongly hoped that the participants would continue the activity, but local LERI co-researcher had a different opinion. The

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<sup>25</sup> Autonomia Foundation has significant experience both with scholarship systems and local development funds from other programmes (OSI, Swiss-Hungarian Civil Fund, microfinance projects).

<sup>26</sup> Evaluation interview, Mayor, August 2016, personal interview.

<sup>27</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Participants\_Leaders\_Besence', 08.12.2016

<sup>28</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Mayor\_Csányoszró', 08.11.2016

mayor also emphasised that the value of the activity was not the direct sustainability of the chicken breeding but the cooperation:

*"They started cooperating. They shared the tasks and learnt how to prepare a budget and longer-term planning."*

It also has to be mentioned that the idea of the poultry slaughterhouse and pet-food factory originated from this small-scale project.

The sustainability of the **local project** is most problematic **in Vajszló**. The dance club was not planned to continue after the local LERI research project period, but it is also doubtful that the local community could continue with any local activity. Development of the local community is barely detectable. Participants stated in the interview<sup>29</sup> that local people could not and cannot be involved because they do not want to take part in any community-based activity. They fulfilled the expectations of LERI, they organised the dance club, but it was mainly children who took part. Many people of the local Roma community are looking for an opportunity to leave the village, either to go to another Hungarian settlement or abroad, *"Only the most unmotivated people stay here. They do not want to do anything. This is very hard."* Although the mayor and the participants alluded to this in a different way, they have a common opinion:

*"If there are no investors and investments, the local people will not have any chance to improve their lives. Of course, not everybody is able to work in an eight-hour, strict position. They will stick to the public work programmes, but the youngsters and some motivated people could benefit from a real job. But it rather seems to be a dream."*

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

### At programming level of allocation system of EU funds

Although, none of the three villages has the appropriate capacity to apply and manage the available larger-scale EU-funded programmes, these funds may represent the only way for significant development for these villages because this micro-region is not attractive to commercial investors in its existing state.

That is, if the villages could access these funds with their existing administrative background, it could be rather harmful regarding the efficiency of the use of funds and the local community. The structure and administrative conditions of these programmes and the local capacity have to be developed in parallel. Developing local capacity without an available and smart funding system would awaken expectations causing greater frustration. On the other hand, developing a funding system without credible and professional local actors to implement projects would be further justification for the necessity of inflexible and rigid funding schemes (what we have now) because of the prospective failure of the funded projects.

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<sup>29</sup> Evaluation interview, 'Participants\_Vajszló', 08.11.2016

Summarising the experiences gained in the local LERI research project, there are certain **recommendations** with respect to services that could enable the most disadvantaged social groups to access EU funds and use such funds efficiently and effectively in order to improve their situation.

The fundamental **complex problem** in connection with the EU Structural Funds is that they are designed to reduce gaps between and within regions, but in practice it is the most underdeveloped regions and the most disadvantaged social groups that do not have access to the funds (to the necessary extent). In fact, the gaps between regions and groups increase or at least are conserved. The absence of 'access routes' between the funds and the regions and groups that are excluded from their use is attributable firstly to the condition of these groups (lack of capacity, non-functioning communities, missing skills and knowledge, lack of information on available funding schemes and that of successful development experiences, etc.), and secondly to the nature of the system in which the funds are distributed (inherent preference to large-scale projects) and the anomalies of their operations (opaque, inconsistent and overly bureaucratic practices, focusing on stand-alone projects instead of an organic approach where one project is based on the previous one).

The **needs of the disadvantaged groups and local communities vary** in terms of the type of support that they require in order to successfully join EU-funded development programmes and improve their standard of living. Therefore, the various forms of support services are potentially the elements of (or, assuming ideal operations, models for) a well-functioning and sophisticated project support system /technical assistance that should be adapted to the specific needs of each group or region.<sup>30</sup>

Successful inclusion of disadvantaged social groups and regions in EU development projects **depends on too many factors** at the same time. In order to attain the best possible results, it is fundamentally important that project support services/ technical assistance are complemented with (1) efforts in both the planning and the implementation phase to take maximum advantage of the opportunities offered by the regulations with respect to projects designed to close development gaps in the 2014–2020 budget period; (2) simplified administrative procedures; (3) a more transparent and predictable operation of the operative agencies and implementing bodies that are responsible for the distribution of funds; and (4) more consistent practices in identifying and reaching out to disadvantaged social groups and regions.

Depending on the nature of the service, the various types of project support services can be assigned to **various stakeholders**, such as:

- Government authorities and agencies (dissemination of information, technical support);
- NGOs using funds from the EU and other sources ('zero stage' services based on local presence, with capacity development, community development and small grants programmes).

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<sup>30</sup> This model has been adopted from author's working paper in OSI-PGF Planning Programme, 2013, manuscript.

The LERI field expert suggests a 'service pyramid' that reflects the highly varied needs of target groups, with a view to ensuring that local communities receive the type of support that can assist them most efficiently in light of their level of development. Obviously, these are only models and the situations on the ground are never so neatly categorised, but they still give a good illustration of the main building blocks of a more tailor-made support system. Another important factor that should not be overlooked is that as organisations and communities change and develop, they might need different services at different (project) periods. A summary of the needs and forms of support is illustrated in the figure below.

**Figure 1. Project support services model**

Framework: taking advantage of regulatory opportunities, administrative measures, feedback in planning, user-friendly operation of the financial distribution system, transparent and predictable application processes, organic development		Development level of local community / organisation
General information dissemination, technical assistance	Development strategy based on community planning, high quality project planning and development	
Advice on application drafting, consulting during implementation	Past experience, existing partnerships, ideas for development. Assistance required mainly for specific applications for grants	
Community planning, generating partnerships, project development	Smaller projects, no partnerships or coordinated planning	
Community development, generating project ideas, small grants programme, assistance in the creation and start-up of small NGOs, local presence	No functioning community, experience, ability to describe needs	

Source: LERI field expert, 2016

The local LERI research project intervened at the first three levels of this pyramid with variable success. In Besence, community-based planning and project development with the involvement of experts from Pécs can be put on the third level ('Past experience...') and the LERI field expert could have advised the organisational part of the project and the preparation of the background materials, documents.

Although the Local Development Plan was developed in Besence, it was a rather formal procedure and the existing document does not promise any feasible improvement because the funding element (or hope) is completely missing from the background. In addition, these development meetings, documents and strategies do fit into regional or national development strategies just formally. That is, these documents are compulsory or politically supported but the EU Operative Programmes or central development programmes do not have a direct connection to the special local needs. If the local needs are assessed with genuine participation and the development plan based upon real involvement (resulting in strategies that will differ from the usual, official, formal ones), there will be extremely difficult to find funding for them.

The LESs are compulsory for every Hungarian settlement. Three LESs were developed in the project period of local LERI research. The LESs of Csányoszló and Vajszló were updated by an external organisation, TKKI (see sections above), without any involvement of the inhabitants. They consulted with the mayor and sent the updated documents to the municipalities for approval. Besence's LES was developed with the involvement of the local people and the local development strategy was defined using PAR methods even though the implementation was not perfect (see above).

The chance for the funding for LESs is no worse in the case of the non-participative development documents than in the case of Besence. The development programmes and the evaluators (decision-makers) do not seek the credibility of the local development projects (applications). Nevertheless, if Besence wants to find funding for the local development fund, which is based upon the local needs, this seems to be rather impossible regarding the existing funding structure.

In Csányoszló and Vajszló, local LERI research project could achieve the first (lowest) level ('No functioning community, experience, ability to describe needs'). Formal entities (organisation) could not represent the special needs of the local Roma people.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the local community could not be considered as a 'community' because the LERI field expert could find only interpersonal links but neither community-based decisions nor experience with them was typical. It was obvious that implementation of a small-scale project was a feasible LERI aim in both villages to motivate the local people and start thinking about future projects and generating basic project ideas. In the long term, systematic development of the local human capacity *and* a proactive NGO could serve the interests of the local people but this would go far beyond the LERI time and budget constraints.

The whole local LERI research in this micro-region is a good example of how a realistic and sustainable development programme has to be:

- **complex:** With community building, involvement, energy-consuming planning activities, realistic funding, mentoring, monitoring (which is not investigation!), evaluation. Repeating the term 'project cycle' without concrete measures, actions and methods caused alienation towards professional development.
- **long term:** Which is not equivalent to a 'long and meaningless' procedure. That is, a long programme period is meaningful when various programme phases build on one another and the timing and funding is reliable. A programme is not long term in the sense of the months of a calendar, but in the operation of the various project parts, and there can be long gaps waiting for a decision or for funding or something else within the programme structure.
- **participative:** LERI proved that expectations regarding the involvement of local inhabitants are sometimes exaggerated. The language of development policy is far removed from the uneducated or simply under-

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<sup>31</sup> Although the Roma Minority Self-Government exists in Vajszló, its capacity, reputation and human capacity could not give influence the local decisions. The leader of this entity was elected to this position during the period of LERI and had not gained significant experience in this position.

informed people. They can be involved in small local actions and discussions, which can result in general goals, but those have to be 'translated' for the development documents. It cannot be expected that these local communities will take part directly in the discussions of long and complicated strategies. Participation is important but the skills, knowledge and experience of the project staff is crucial and the frame of the involvement has to be clear for the participants. Finally, participants have to be informed about the clear and tangible aims of the development process. They need jobs, not strategies. They need appropriate housing, not appropriate legal regulation. Translating these aims into regulation, funding, strategies has to be done by experts. (Remember the participant from Besence: "*Do we have jobs? No. It was just talking.*")

- **flexible:** In LERI, local actors enjoyed flexibility regarding the use of the LERI local fund; this facilitated the necessary changes in the local LERI activities that were unavoidable (e.g. use of the funds in Csányoszró and Vajszló). Flexibility has to be used circumspectly: despite the risk analysis being a compulsory part of the development documents, the different levels of risk for fund management do not seem to be reflected in development programmes; the regulation is almost the same in the case of a small-scale local development programme as in large-scale infrastructural investment (both funded by the EU).
- **step-by-step methodology:** As the LERI field expert drafted in the 'pyramid', different levels need different measures: the mayors of the three LERI settlements are waiting for big EU (or governmental) funds without having the relevant experience in project management. If the aim of a development programme is sustainable local development, the local actors and organisations have to be trained and experienced to manage large funds. This is not true for the preparation of financial reports on the funding exclusively, but for the transparency, project management, monitoring, evaluation, etc. This can be achieved by step-by-step funding and development processes.

## Use of PAR

If we want to place the three studied villages on this 'service pyramid', Besence would be placed somewhere between levels three to four, the other two villages in the fourth one. PAR methods **are necessary** at these two levels **because local development activity cannot take place without the mobilisation and involvement of the local inhabitants**. The well-known project management method is not designed for this sensitive and principally different activity.

On the other hand, PAR methods **can be used only with a full consensus on its aims and principles** in the circle of the local actors because, even in the case of local Roma leadership, the process could be at fault resulting in a kind of 'tokenism'.

## 7. Additional Information

### Acknowledgements

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