

**PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE CHANCES FOR CHILDREN
AND HOW THEY LOOK WHEN APPLIED TO MICRO-REGIONS**

Dilemmas and lessons

The study was funded by
Open Society Institute

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Budapest, 2013

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² The Hungarian Academy of Sciences Program to Give Kids a Chance (MTA-GYEP), the first to try micro-regional application, was closed down in September 2011. The initial materials for the current document were prepared by the staff of that program while the study itself was written and edited by Ágnes Darvas and Zsuzsa Ferge.

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
I. Introduction	9
II. General lessons learned, matters of principle, dilemmas.....	16
1. Complexity – cooperation	20
2. Social processes on long and short term – program and project.....	24
3. Who should the program be serving, who is the target?	28
4. Integration of the Roma minority	31
5. Conflicts of values: can attitudes be changed?.....	35
6. Resources and sustainability	38
7. Locals and experts from the outside and from above	40
8. Measuring projects and programs	48
III. Micro-regional organization of the children’s program	49
1 The point of departure	52
2 Preparations, inclusion of local players, conflicts in attitudes.....	57
3 Service development	59
4. Staffing	60
5. Services.....	62
6. The early years – the Sure Start program – Children’s Cottages	65
7. Study hall type programs	65
8. Community center, settlements.....	66
9. Outcomes.....	68
SUMMARY.....	71

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Strategy “Making Things Better for our Children” is a multi-generational program (2007-2032) adopted by Parliament in 2007. The concept called for implementing the nationwide program at both the “top,” where legislation was enacted and central distribution was regulated, and the “bottom,” in the localities where the personal services and institutions were operating.

The National Strategy rested on a program to combat child poverty, designed in 2006 by the Program Office to Combat Child Poverty, which formed a unit within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (one of its social science institutes). The Program Office began implementing its strategy in 2006 in the Szécsény micro-region. In 2008 it began to prepare the groundwork to cover five more of the most disadvantaged micro-regions.

This study describes the actual implementation process. It is centered on the lessons of program application in Szécsény. To this we have added lessons of general validity learned during the preparatory phase of extension to additional micro-regions. The first part of the study focuses on the questions of principle and the dilemmas that arose in implementation. One such problem was how to manage the program in all its complexity (given that it covers multiple areas ranging from early skills development to employment of parents), while another was how to coordinate long and short-term requirements. Still another was the need to re-shape attitudes. And then, of course, there was the question of targeting. The top priority of the local program was clearly to reach the Roma and others in deep poverty through “explicit but not exclusive targeting.” Among the staff members of the local (Szécsény) team there were many Roma without causing any strain within the team. However, when applied to all of Szécsény, the assistance aimed at Gypsy families and children generated a great deal of tension among the non-Roma.

The second part of the study offers a more detailed review of the experimental implementation in Szécsény as well as of a few of the important components of Strategy implementation in other profoundly disadvantaged regions. Included are the startup and the inherent difficulties, the concept of service development and certain new services such as the Sure Start Children’s Cottages, the study halls, and settlement-level community services in the villages.

Quite a few of the achievements and lessons of the five-and-a-half-year Szécsény Program to Give Kids a Chance and its expansion to other micro-regions deserve a closer look. Implementing the program on local level was possible but at least four or five years were needed for it to take root. Local resources proved essential to local application but even more important was the need for committed – local and outside – staff. Hardest of all was to re-shape attitudes – including racist and anti-poverty attitudes – and to manage the conflicts arising from these attitudes. It was important to learn how great the influence of the national political climate and the gap between rhetoric and reality were on project implementation as well as to realize that the relationship between local governments and the program were not necessarily determined by the political affiliation of the local government.

I. INTRODUCTION

Growing inequality, the erosion of middle-class security and rising manifestations of social exclusion are global phenomena. The consequences – mounting populism, xenophobia and racism, conflicts steeped in violence and the quivering of democracy – portend disaster. Countless documents, critical analyses, strategies, programs, and declarations have been issued on international (such as the United Nations) and European levels as well as by various countries seeking or promising solutions to these problems. In Eastern Europe and particularly in Hungary, these global problems are particularly acute. At the same time, much the same as elsewhere, our government has issued numerous documents pledging its commitment to managing this ensemble of problems including its various components. Documents are generally judged on their merits – they are worth as much as is implemented. Words alone are not very useful. Nonetheless, with regard to certain documents, we believe that official commitment in itself should be welcomed. On the one hand, they lay down principles that may guide in the right direction practices, measures and interventions in various areas. For instance, the effects of the law on equal treatment and equal opportunity were tangible to some degree in public education and employment. On the other hand, they contain targets for which the government can be held accountable – for instance, by civil organizations – which can serve as incentives for participation in public life. Finally, they have a measure of influence on public speech and public thinking and this, while it may not result in deep-reaching change, at least sets political correctness as a requirement.

The Hungarian government document we consider particularly significant from the aspect of this study is the Parliamentary Resolution adopted in 2007 which establishes a 25-year program to reduce child poverty called the National Strategy for Making Things Better for our Children, which we will refer to as the Chances for Children strategy from now on. The basis for it was a government program adopted in 2006, called the National Program to Combat Child Poverty (See Box 1). This program was designed by the Program Office to Combat Child Poverty (MTA GYEP) established at the end of 2005 under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The validity of this program has not expired. The fundamental idea was that (appropriate) social interventions begun sufficiently early in life work best. If these programs are not begun in time, or if they are begun, but they are not followed up by educational and development measures focused on children, and if at least a minimum level of satisfactory living conditions for the children are not guaranteed, then not only will the welfare of a significant portion of the children decline but so will the quality of life of society as a whole. This deterioration will cover a range of factors starting with the lack of an environment which offers hope, and continuing with a shortage of qualified labor, the premature mortality of poor people resulting in an unsustainable society. At the same time, the program does require continuous adjustment based on experience. This is why we sought opportunities to implement the program from the very outset. The MTA GYEP office provided a framework for this.

Box 1.*Overview of the National Program to Combat Child Poverty***THE TARGETS – IN BRIEF**

The targets of this program are

- to reduce the proportion of children and their families who live in poverty to a fraction of the current level in a single generation
- to eliminate the exclusion of children and the extreme forms of deep poverty
- to re-shape the mechanisms and institutions which currently reproduce poverty and exclusion, by
 - guaranteeing healthy living conditions beginning in early childhood
 - ensuring that talents have a better chance of evolving through early childhood development
 - promoting a safe environment for children to grow up in, by reducing the occurrence of deviances that destroy their chances in life
- Within this, the short initial three-year program was fundamentally designed to tangibly reduce the number and proportion of children living in poverty, and significantly improve the living conditions for children who live in deep poverty and who live in an extreme level of exclusion, in preparation for the changes that require a longer time to implement

Source: Brief Program of the National Program to Combat Child Poverty, MTA GYEP, February 2006, p. 5 (www.gyerekesely.hu)

Box 2.*Summary of the goals of the program to combat child poverty**Areas of intervention and horizontal priorities*

	Work with parents	Develop-ing, teaching children	Social measures and services	Better health for children	Improv-ing living conditions (homes)
Priority for Roma children	Reducing the proportion and depth of poverty				
Priority for children with disabilities					
Reducing settlement differences					
Improving major benefit systems already in operation					
Reinforcing rights of children	Reducing the proportion of children living in poverty, enhancing respect for children's rights, reinforcing participation				
Cooperation among sectors, institutions and economic areas					
Participation of all citizens, children					
Dissemination of information, improving access					

Source: Brief Program of the National Program to Combat Child Poverty, MTA GYEP, February 2006, p. 8, Figure 2. (www.gyerekesely.hu)

The public responsibility of the MTA GYEP Office was to promote the implementation of the National Strategy through three main tools: basic research, applied research (monitoring and action-research), and experimental (pilot) implementation. The public responsibilities involved three spheres of activity on three different levels. On *nationwide* level, the job was to *monitor the nationwide program of the National Strategy* through basic research, collections of international and domestic data for meta-analysis, document analysis and critical comments, and to make these information public. On intermediate level, meaning between the nationwide and local level, the task was "*transmission*" of the information. In other words, when the Office began local application of the strategy through the micro-regional experimental projects, Office staff worked as outside experts and assistants in the various regions. The third level is *local implementation*. Office participation on this level was indirect. It covers two types of action, namely the intensive field-work of the office staff in the first experiment and the organization and participation in *the extension of the program to other micro-regions*. The role of the GYEP Office in involving new macro-regions included professional and methodological preparation as well as support for the programs designed by the new actors, which are essentially transmission-type tasks. Local implementation of the programs in the micro-regions included during the extension began in 2010. This means that we have no feedback on the connection between the "transmission" level and local operations.

There are multiple government tools available to promote *implementation of the Strategy on nationwide level*. The obvious and important government job is to employ the means of central redistribution to increase the resources of the institutions and services assisting poor families with children and families and children in general, to assure at least a social minimum determined by consensus. (Protection of poor people is particularly important in periods of economic downturn and a significant portion of EU members have taken measures to do so.³) One responsibility that rests exclusively with the government is legislation, the formulation, coordination and enactment of the regulations and measures that ensure the appropriate institutional frameworks and operations to promote Strategy goals. The legislative process can involve form and content, can endeavor to influence democratic and less democratic modes of operation, can promote less uneven access than exists at present, and through this can influence the attitudes of various social groups. Within the form and operational content of the legal system, we consider respect for human rights, the rights of children, and the rights of the poor to be of particular importance, together with **legal measures aimed at maintaining and respecting human dignity**.

The distribution of government resources and the enactment of legislation were outside of the purview of the GYEP Office. In this area, the responsibility of the Office was limited to ex post critique and proposals (monitoring studies, reports to the government and open letters). On nationwide level, GYEP's responsibility was to monitor the implantation and nationwide impact of the Chances for Children Strategy, primarily through follow-up studies and evaluations. This included on the

³ Social Protection Committee, Brussels, 27th of June 2012. SPC Advisory Report to the European Commission on Tackling and Preventing Child Poverty, Promoting Child Well-Being Social Protection Committee – European Commission – Europa, ec.europa.eu/social/

one hand, empirical data on the situation of children and poverty involvement, with particular respect to at-risk and excluded groups, and on the other, the monitoring of government interventions, legislation and measures that targeted social issues, including follow-ups and analyses of their effects. The job also included relaying our findings on these activities to the public and the government. A dominant player in this responsibility for relaying findings was the National Strategy Evaluation Committee established in 2008 as ordained by the Parliamentary Resolution.⁴ The Committee's role included helping to implement, monitor, and evaluate the strategy. This included designing a follow-up system able to monitor implementation of the various points in the National Strategy and to assure accountability. It also formulated opinions and proposals. Most of the operative issues connected to the Evaluation Committee were handled by the Children's Chance Office operating within the Prime Minister's Office (MeH), while the MTA GYEP Office provided the research and scientific background for Evaluation Committee operations. The research findings of the MTA GYEP Office and the 2009 and 2010 reports of the Evaluation Committee (edited by the GYEP Office) can be accessed at the www.gyerekesely.hu website. The Evaluation Committee was revamped in 2011. It lost its purely civic character when 12 representatives of the government were appointed to the committee alongside the 12 civil members.⁵ The Evaluation Committee's report for 2011 dealt primarily with performance of Committee tasks⁶, not with processes involving children. This was why a Civil Report on the situation of children was written for 2011 by the one-time staff of the MTA GYEP, now as members of the Chances for Children Association⁷. (For further reference: Civic report on children's chances 2012).

Implementation of the Chances for Children Strategy was hampered by numerous obstacles. Starting with the first year after it was begun, 2008, the government's commitment to the program gradually waned, with the exception of a few areas including vitally important school integration. The goals remained valid on the level of rhetoric but not in practice. When for instance the economic crisis struck the government did not even attempt to offer as much as minimum protections to poor families, when, for instance, parents with children were left jobless (as was done in numerous other countries that also were hit by the crisis⁸).

In 2011, the Chances for Children Strategy as a separate entity was terminated. The government adopted a **National Social Inclusion Strategy**- Deep poverty, child

⁴ The Committee consisted of nine members delegated by civil and religious organizations which the government invited to participate.

⁵ The committee was restructured in late 2011 to include 24 members. The government appointed the Committee chair, who was the state secretary responsible for social inclusion and designated representatives of 11 ministries and other public administration bodies, while the civil side consisted of one delegate from each of 9 NGOs and three delegates of religious organizations.

⁶ Report on implementation of the 2011 tasks of the "Making Things Better for our Children" National Strategy Evaluation Committee <http://romagov.kormany.hu/jelentes-a-legyen-jobb-a-gyermekneknemzeti-strategia-ertekelo-bizottsag-2011-evi-feladatainak-vegrehajtasarol>

⁷ Ferge, Zs, Darvas, Á (Eds) (2012) Civil Report on Chances for Children, 2011 [In Hungarian] Chances for Children Public Service Association, Budapest 2012 (The writing, publication and Internet accessibility of this report was made possible by the Open Society Institute: http://gyere.net/downloads/Civil_jelentes_2011.pdf)

⁸ Social Protection Committee, Op. cit.

poverty and Roma (2011-2020)⁹. (hereinafter: Social Inclusion Strategy) According to this document, *“the Hungarian inclusion policy attempts to promote the integration, extension and management in a standard target system of the strategies of specific problem areas relevant to poverty (strategies concerning child poverty, the Roma and disadvantaged regions) in the interest of the more effective enforcement of inter-sectoral approaches. Accordingly, the Strategy integrates the approaches and objectives of the „Making Things Better for our Children“ National Strategy and the Decade of Roma Integration Programme (DRIP) Strategic Plan.”* The content of the Social Inclusion Strategy meets European expectations and public announcements have reported on a favorable European reception and good on-schedule performance.¹⁰

We believe there is merit to combining national programs that combat exclusion. In principle the move really can help connect the programs organizationally and prevent parallel actions. Merging local offices can save on costs. Given that one of the responsibilities of the re-vamped Evaluation Committee is to monitor and evaluate implementation of the “Making Things Better for our Children” National Strategy and given that this Strategy is specifically referred to in the action plan of the National Social Inclusion Strategy it might be possible to separately monitor the children’s situation. If proper tools are designed they could be used for other components of the National Inclusion Strategy, as well that seems to us necessary

However, the government action plan for 2012-2014¹¹ reveals us that the formula for turning long-term strategy into short-term planning has still not been designed. The concept behind the designing of action plans remains unchanged. Much the same as the action plan beginning in 2008, the 2012 plan contains a list of existing programs and projects mostly funded by the European Social Fund, with declining¹² domestic funding. Also all the programs are disjointed into separate projects. Implementation of the portion of the Social Inclusion Strategy scheduled for the given time frame looks doubtful or more bluntly, improbable, based on the action plan. One particular problem is that the content of a number of government measures taken since the Social Inclusion Strategy was adopted were not in line with the Social Inclusion Strategy. (For instance, numerous components of the public education reform reduce rather than improve inclusion and desegregation possibilities.) *Civil Report on Children 2012* offers details on these difficulties and on the flow of events and measures of recent years.

The job of up and down transmission is essential when projects are implemented locally. If the nationwide program is to be monitored and proposals for adjustments formulated, it is essential that local experience with application “go up to the top.” No matter how great the effort on government level to provide resources and grant rights, the transformation of the broader social spectrum to serve the short and long-term interests of children must start out on local level and a significant portion of the changes

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_hungary_strategy_en.pdf

¹⁰ <http://romagov.kormany.hu/magyarorszag-elenjaro-az-unios-tagorszagok-kozott-a-romastrategia-megvalositasaban>

¹¹ Government Decree 1430/2011. (XII. 13.) Korm. decree on the National Social Inclusion Strategy and the government Action Plan for its implementation in 2012-2014

¹² Government Decree 1428/2012. (X. 8.) Korm. significantly reduces the domestic co-payment that should supplement the EU Funds.

must be to the local environment. The institutions directly serving children and their families operate in the local environment and the first place where the citizens experience how power relations operate, is on local level. The settlements are really the only locales where the operation of the various institutions may be made more child and family-friendly, where the alleviation of segregation can be achieved in practice, where everyone can receive appropriate information and where the types and levels of services and needs of various groups, families and individuals can be accurately assessed.

Local implementation of the program is key. A new UNDP study on the situation of the Roma also underlines the significance of local jobs. "The similarity of exclusion patterns across EU Member States is striking and leaves no excuse for delaying swift, effective action to improve the situation. The renewed efforts for Roma integration, however, will only bring sustainable results if they engage with the local communities, Roma and non-Roma..."¹³

Countless conditions must be met for a program to be accepted on local level. Often, project implementation requires changes in the operations, routines and attitudes of existing institutions. A fundamental question is whether it can be achieved without external resources, which includes financial, intellectual and symbolic resources. Internationally, it has generally been found that outside incentives ranging from financial assistance to transfers of knowledge and information aimed at updating attitudes and practices are needed to start up significant local changes. It is very rare to see a local demand for change to spontaneously evolve on local level. This is not simply resistance to change or inertia, but often a belief that nothing will change anyway. The attitudes and commitment levels of the actors in local authorities, schools, etc. are varied. It is always unsure whether there is any local dissatisfaction and a willingness to change things, and whether there is hope that intentions to effect change will actually produce that change. The "downward" component of transmission work is intended to contribute to reinforcing the desire for change and the will to achieve it.

Local level is where the rubber meets the road, where we see what part of a nationwide program resting on a foundation of principle works well and what works poorly or not at all. The MTA GYEP Office started up its "Szécsény experimental application" (Szécsény Chances for Children Program, hereinafter: Szécsény Experiment or SZGYEP) in Szécsény precisely to gain local experience for extension and feedback as well as to promote local field programs. Given the complexity of the program, the application was also complex. The venue was the Szécsény micro-region in Nógrád County, which in 2006 was one of the 42 most disadvantaged micro-regions in the country.¹⁴ Our reason for choosing a region consisting of small villages without the proximity of a large town or city was that child poverty in Hungary is primarily a rural phenomenon (and is becoming even more so) in contrast with most other countries where urban child poverty is more typical.¹⁵

¹³ UNDP, FRA (2012) The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Survey results at a glance.

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/UNDP_Roma_Poverty_Reduction_Roma_Survey.pdf

¹⁴ A number of other parameters were considered when choosing this particular place. They included comparatively easy access from Budapest, a comparatively transparent structure, manageable size including number of children, 13 settlements, a population of 20,000, and a significant number of Roma residents.

¹⁵ The State of the World's Children 2012. Children in an Urban World. Unicef 2012

Expansion of the program to other micro-regions (essentially through transmission) using EU funds was a requirement that was fully supportable. The Szécsény Experiment was intended to do more than offer local feedback to the nationwide program. The goal, right from the start, was to put the experience to use in disseminating the program to other micro-regions.¹⁶ The MTA GYEP Office prepared a methodology and training manual for dissemination based on its own experience with the Szécsény program including the experience of the outside experts who participated. The experiment qualified as action research because of this, even though – given the novel nature of the experiment – it took a while for the tools of action research to evolve. During the extension process, regional coordinators and professionals routinely became participants in the action research.

The objective of this study is to offer a brief summary of and share the micro-regional applications, primarily the lessons in principle and practice of the Szécsény Experiment learned so far. Planning for the 2014-2020 time frame and the idea of continuing to disseminate the program adds topicality to this report as does the fact that the MTA GYEP Office was closed down in 2011¹⁷. The gradual processing of the past six years of experience with Szécsény and the micro-region will, we hope, help the program to continue to grow, with local level implementation in Hungary and in other countries where conditions are to some extent similar¹⁸.

¹⁶ An example of government indifference specific to Hungary is the only possible reason why no administration treated the Szécsény Experiment as either a domestic responsibility or as an organic (and affordable) portion of the SROP (National Program for Social Renewal) program, while every official document (SROP grant offers, government action plan) specified that the MTA GYEP model experiment was the basis for micro-regional extension. There was no change in this absurd situation at any time, despite oft repeated efforts by the GYEP Office.

¹⁷ Funding for the operation of the MTA GYEP Office, which was always uncertain, began to dry up in the latter half of 2010. The EU funding available only covered preparations in micro-regional extension, while there was a minimum amount available for transmission and local operations. In September of 2011 the leadership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences resolved to alter the role played by the MTA. It ruled that the transmission work by the specialists involved in the Szécsény Experiment and connected action research were not Academy tasks. The EU transferred most of the SROP 5.2.3 funding for extension of the program to the Wekerle Sándor Fund Manager and did the same with most of the professionals working on the program. (WSA accepted the transfer of some of them.) In line with the original plan, it added the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service which has a great deal of experience in this area. Unfortunately, the reorganization was not coordinated and the GYEP Office was unable to prepare for the change. Therefore the GYEP Office management felt that with the termination of the essence of its work: the multifunctional and tri-level activity – basic research, application in the field and action research for bi-directional transmission – maintaining the office became financially impossible and professionally moot. Since an MTA team was a requirement for submission of a SROP grant application, the Academy used its own funds to establish a successor organization within the MTA Social Science Research Center, called the Chances for Children Research Group. The main tasks of this group involve the secondary processing of domestic and international research into child poverty and research on micro-regional extension. It appears that they lack the funding for new basic research and, as a research group they do not participate in program application. This has led to the termination of the complex process of research-application-feedback, which we consider unfortunate.

¹⁸ For more information on this experience see: Bass, László (Ed) (2012) *Az ötödik év után. Egy félbeszakadt akciókutatás története, 2006-2011* (After the fifth year: The story of an interrupted action research project, 2006-2011) [In Hungarian] This volume was published with the support of the Open Society Institute. (Hereinafter, we will refer to it as Interrupted Action Research 2012.). Another study was by Ágnes Hadházy; Viktória Póti; Adrienn Bíró and Erzsébet Forrai and was called Micro-regional extension (Kistérségi kiterjesztés). (Both studies are accessible on the www.gyere.net website)

II. GENERAL LESSONS LEARNED, MATTERS OF PRINCIPLE, DILEMMAS

1. *Complexity – cooperation*

Poverty is a complex concept. The reproduction process is exceedingly complicated so altering it requires consideration and management of the complexities. In this context, complexity can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The following are a few of the more important aspects.

- The diversity of the *levels* on which the action takes place. As we have already suggested, the program to combat poverty and exclusion demands that we act on national (government and institutional) level, on local (parts of settlements, settlements, micro-regions and possibly larger local) levels, and in between the two, relaying information between these levels.
- The differences and connections between the *time frames* of the actions. There is a huge difference between the economic and social conditions and the feasibility of attaining short-term, medium-term and long-term goals. To have the “short-term” goal, which is present during every moment of operation, come closer to the more distant objectives instead of drifting away from them we need to pay constant attention, to manage conflicts of interests, and to monitor flows in a variety of ways.
- The multitude of *areas* for action. If we are to achieve real change, coordinated and successful efforts are needed to change everything from income policy and housing policy to the education and health care institutions to personal services. In addition to actually changing “objective” conditions, we also must effect changes in mentality (such as reducing prejudices).
- The complexity of the *sectors* involved in the action. We can expect definite or possible participation by the public sector, the private sector, the actors in the social economy cooperating with the project – in particularly the cooperatives - and the civil world, assuming it exists in every aspect from the planning phase to implementation and monitoring.
- The wide variety of *actors*. The actors, the individuals are part and parcel of events in so many contexts that we can only spotlight a few. Fundamental to the program is the nature of the *connections* that are established between the organizers and implementers of the program and the people whose lives the program wants to change. Questions that come up – and have come up – in this context relate to the question of “whose program is this anyway,” does it belong to the people who came up with it and are promoting it or to the people it is all about? (Quite a few important subjects come from this question, such as participation, empowerment, and democratic decision-making.)
- The wide variety and large number of *institutions and professions* participating in the program. There is only one way to manage a diverse crowd like this and

that is through cooperation on every level and between all levels. To really reduce child poverty we need all involved institutions, professions and all adults who work with children to be ready and willing to cooperate, if agreement is to be reached with respect to the joint values affecting the current and future lives of the children and if all involved entities are ready to coordinate their specific interests with the common interests of the children.

- Well, in practice, just about every component of that ensemble has been violated since 2007, or at best, has been very difficult to manage. The following examples should illustrate the difficulties of government and local levels alike.

(Complexity and government planning) One government official (who was liaising with the MTA GYEP Office) reported to the responsible state secretary as early as 2007 that there were major problems with the content of cooperation among the government bodies. This very early warning is just one indication of the need to connect all similar inclusion programs: “[Implementation of the National Strategy] will only succeed if supported by coordinated social policies. There is no uniform coordination of the Chances for Children program. The development resources and implementation of the action plans are the responsibility of multiple ministries while the coordination of the National Development Office is focused primarily on planning. This situation has not been alleviated by the countless flagship projects that have been designed, since coordination even within the various flagships is weak, while the Chances for Children program is sufficiently complex to have links with multiple flagship projects. (Just one example: one of the horizontal objectives of the Chances for Children program is to reduce or eliminate regional differences. A separate flagship project has been designed to do this same thing and its contents are almost completely parallel to the Chances for Children targets, for instance regarding improving the level of public services. At the same time, the logic on which portions of the project are based is quite different and its “philosophy” is the complete opposite)... Given this lack of coordination, we are very concerned about assuring the coordination of social policy, professional policy, and public policy – already approved by the government – (the crime prevention project, *The Child is a Treasure that Belongs to Us All*, the Roma Decade project, the National Sport Strategy, the National Strategic Report and so on.)” (This comes from the copy of the government official’s comments sent to the MTA GYEP Office.)

To this day, reasonable coordination has not evolved among the ministries (or given the administrative changes of 2010, between the state secretariats within given ministries). Separate investigations really should be made to determine the causes of this lack of coordination and ascertain the nature of the problem.

(Problems in coordinating the planning time frames) One difficulty that has been present since the very beginning has been that funding has been timed to a completely different time frame and schedule than what would be needed to implement the program. For instance, European Union development funds were designed for seven year operative programs, regional operative programs and flagship projects, while the EU 2020 strategy and Social Inclusion Strategy covers a ten-year time frame and government measures and action plans are set for two or three years. The national budget is designed for a single year. So far, no government level effort has been made to manage the issues arising from these different time frames, even in principle.

(*Local cooperation problems*) The *local* programs designed to combat poverty generally operate within the areas of action set down in the National Strategy even though not everything may be possible on local level, which might have its own different priorities. The Szécsény Experiment was a separate regional project with multiple parts. These parts consisted of:

- promoting early childhood skills and talent while reinforcing the parental role (Sure Start Children's Cottages)
- introducing a variety of services aimed at a more successful school performance (a network of school coordinators, inclusion of top teachers, leisure programs outside of school hours, school study halls, programs for the summer months and other non-school times)
- improving family circumstances focused on residences and community conditions (social work, community center)
- promoting parental employment (social cooperatives, employment counseling, Second Chance programs)
- developing opportunities for participation in information society (network of IT mentors, IT access points, mobile units equipped with IT facilities, courses in digital literacy, and
- introducing measures for a healthier childhood (school meals, screening programs run by medical specialists).

It proved to be quite difficult to connect these areas. A few examples of this:

- Micro-regions tend not to have separate identities. In general, identities derived from residence in a settlement or possibly in a region are much stronger (this may, of course, be a purely Hungarian phenomenon). In principle, the micro-regional associations did assure cooperation among the settlements, at least among those that were actively participating in the associations. Nonetheless, there was hardly a case (if at all) in which the villages of a micro-region set up the real means of cooperation (transportation coordination, coordination of school enrollment, exchanges of experience by the providers of services for children in the various villages, and so on.) Cooperation was made more difficult because of competition for funding and conflicts in power games, with different villages jockeying for administrative authority. Not surprisingly, the stronger ones generally win (it is demonstrable that funds obtained by a micro-region through joint bids generally benefit the central settlement of the micro-region more than the others).
- Coordinated development in the various regions is well nigh impossible because of the ease or difficulty in obtaining funding. The difficulty is not only that project logic (a topic we will return to) forces the different areas of intervention to obtain separate funding even for complex programs and some areas of intervention obtain funding more easily than others. Another obstacle is that the priority of meeting certain needs in the bidding process and in the effort to overcome poverty may be very different. In other words, an education and training program has comparatively good chances of obtaining funding, while one to provide safe drinking water does not.
- Another thing that needs to be emphasized is that cooperation among the different types of professionals (and their assistants) who work directly with

children and their families has still to be realized. Institutions working with children, assistants and front-line workers generally have no contact with one another. Even in smaller settlements it may happen that when a child enters school there will be no detailed discussion of experience with the child between the pre-school teacher who has worked with her/him till then and the school teacher who is about to begin to do so. In Szécsény, inter-professional workshops we set up were the primary tool in breaking through this barrier. The inter-professional cooperation that gradually evolved there made the lines between competencies a bit easier to step over, since in many cases the various professionals were attempting to resolve the same problem. However, when job security is threatened, anxiety may become an obstacle if the actors fear that their jobs are being threatened by the sharing of competencies.

- Initially, all the “Transmission” experts were specialists in one or another area. It took a long time for them to realize that that as professionals they were not properly representing the complexity of the program if they failed to find common ground with one another. In other words, the sub-area of IT was a natural ally of the school and the study hall since both institutions were working to bridge the digital gap. IT managed to more or less connect to the study hall but had less luck with the school. Another example: the school mentors should have played an important role in the home neighborhood program, but took little advantage of this opportunity. We could go on and on citing examples. At the same time the years of effort by outside specialists did yield results (Box 1.3).
-

Box 3

“When organized inter-professional discussions got underway in the various settlements not only did the participants in our program and the teachers get a chance to meet and coordinate efforts at least once a month, but so did representatives of other social professions. These discussions were good for sharing information as well as for bringing up problems and working together to resolve them. This is the complexity initially targeted by the Chances for Children program and it appears that it has finally initiated a process in which even local professionals feel less alone with their problems. They are realizing that they can get help from other professions and that the cooperation was making the job easier for them all.” (Comment written by the education expert, 2010).

2. Social processes on long and short term – program and project

The “Making Things Better for our Children” National Strategy believes that at least a full generation is necessary for there to be any radical change in reducing child poverty and preventing its reproduction.¹⁹ Income poverty could be alleviated much more quickly with, for instance, the introduction of some sort of social minimum (as would be desperately needed), but it would not put a dent into the lack of complex institutions and services that might block the reproduction of poverty. Among other factors, money is needed for the social changes and developments we want, and there is little or no way of obtaining it in the given areas through market mechanisms. To put it more succinctly: without public funding child poverty will not be reduced on either short or longer term. In 2007 – and ever since – the government felt that it had very little if any domestic resources for this purpose. Therefore, the government planned to cover whichever targets could be fitted into the European Social Fund framework with EU money (adding minimum domestic co-funding when forced to). The rather uniform reduction in the resources for public welfare and child welfare suggests that the government did not buy the concept argued for by a growing number of professional documents including analyses of international bodies that highest amount of expenditure for this purpose will result in a multiple payoff in the future, while cutting back on this type of funding will put balanced future development at risk (See Boxes 1.4, 5. and 6.)

Textbox 4

The first six years of life and in particular, the first two are decisive to the healthy cognitive, emotional behavioral, physical and social development of children. These are sensitive and irreplaceable years within the life cycle, when the brain, the body and interpersonal skills go through an accelerated development phase. The return on investments into this period of life will vastly outweigh the costs.

Source: Social Protection Committee, *op. cit.* p. 20

¹⁹ In the meantime, we should mention that at the time this was written, in autumn of 2012, the idea of reducing child poverty seems to have disappeared from the government’s list of intentions – in fact, some of its measures are producing the direct opposite. However, the current policy is untenable on longer term, so our analysis rests on the hypothesis that the current policy of exclusion will have to change comparatively soon. The more civilized norms reflected in the National Social Inclusion Strategy will have to be upheld sooner or later.

Box 5.

Based on a review of benefit-cost evidence, this paper identifies four areas of investment that merit expanded federal funding even in a time of fiscal austerity. America's future economic well-being will benefit from targeted investments to ensure that children have the skills to become tomorrow's adult workers, caregivers, taxpayers, and citizens. Target areas for a package of proposals totaling about \$25 billion annually and \$133 billion over a five-year period are the following:

- High-quality early childhood education programs for three and four-year-old children (\$94 billion over five years);
- Home-visiting programs by nurses to promote sound prenatal care and the healthy development of infants and toddlers (\$14 billion over five years);
- School reform with an emphasis on programs in high-poverty elementary schools that improve the acquisition of basic skills for all students (\$17 billion over five years); and
- Programs that reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy (\$8 billion over five years).

Source: Brookings Institution 2007, Cost-Effective Investments in Children, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2007/01/01childrenfamilies-isaacs>

In the past ten or twenty years, grant monies attained through competitive projects have grown until they are now the dominant form of distributing public monies. Obviously, this is partly because of European integration processes²⁰, apparently as projects seemed the most expedient way of distributing European funds in a reasonably fair and transparent way.

As far as projects as such are concerned, defining what they are has been quite chaotic. Nonetheless, certain features are common to all, as far as funding is concerned. One specific we have to live with is the finite duration of a project. Another is that it has to create something new and unique, which can be either a product or a service. Still another is that the flows, and the amount and pacing of the costs, as well as the outcomes should be precisely defined. In fact outcomes have to be described by quantified indicators. A huge number of protocol specifications have evolved, depending on the nature and size of the project, covering management, accounting, risk assessment and monitoring, for instance.

Projects, be they linked to nature, technology or society, have become the dominant vehicle of distributing development funds. Of the EU funding made available to Hungary between 2007 and 2013, barely 20 percent went into purely social pro-

²⁰ "In the decades preceding the turn of the century the idea of turning developments into projects essentially took over from both market-based and directly distributed funds. Projects became the dominant form of development and management as well as of the organization and monitoring of research. Kovách, Imre (2007) Turning development policy into projects and the project class. [In Hungarian] Szociológiai Szemle, 3-4. 214-222

grams (Social Renewal). Nonetheless, it was a huge amount at nearly 4 billion euros. This is why, at the very outset it would have been worthwhile thinking about whether completely identical rules could be applied to all sectors of life or were there possible differences between say, economic and technical projects on the one hand and human and social projects on the other. On our own part, we think there are huge differences that would have required different project methodologies. The basic differences lie in the nature of the interaction between the intervention and the target of the intervention, in other words, what is the role of human consciousness in the responses of one or another area and how quickly do the intended and unintended consequences of the intervention appear. As far as we know, sadly no thought has been dedicated to the problem. One portion of a bid for funding that we have included in the following box illustrates the consequences of not having examined this issue. It was taken from the social operative program tender that describes professional requirements and it is quite apparent that these categories cannot be interpreted in the human–social field.

Box 7.

Presentation of the detailed professional content of the development/project

- What preparatory activity has been done to date for this development, e.g.: preparation of designs, procurement of permits, coordination with partners, etc.
- Please review the most important steps in project implementation; describe the most important activities of the project for which you wish to obtain funding
- List the precise professional/technical, etc. standards you wish to use during the project
- Does the product/service that is the outcome of this project have a surplus value, and if so, please define it
- Please list and review the technology and machinery to be procured and briefly discuss their operation, application areas, main technical parameters and technological levels
- Please use this section of the application to review the manufacturing licenses and manufacturing know-how you plan to purchase

(Social Renewal Program: detail taken from "Guidelines in filling our the Project Datasheet"

We obviously could not change any of those rules. We merely wish to mention that in our experience many features of social interventions do not fit in with the general concept of what a project consists of. One root problem is that a complex social program that needs to run for several decades, such as the program to overcome child poverty, cannot really be squeezed into three-year projects. Certain portions of it might be fit into projects but that requires designing the contents and the time-lines of the connections between the various program portions in advance. If this is not done, there will be a whole series of problems. Just a few examples:

- Projects are generally built around a single, well delimited goal. A program that qualifies as complex can usually be carried out only by running several projects. Complex projects covering several interrelated objectives are rare. Even in these cases synergies are hard to manage and there are no built-in ways of creating and financing cooperation mechanisms. (Inter-professional discussions for instance, proved to be extremely useful but ran up transport and similar costs that the project did not cover.)
- A project is meant to stick to the predefined project components and cannot consider even fundamental problems outside its mandate. We need to realize that the failure of various anti-poverty projects may have been caused precisely because of such problems. (For instance, a project may manage to enroll children in secondary school. But travel costs to and from the school may not be accepted as a necessary component of the bid, or the defective transportation services may not be handled by the project. The project is doomed to failure. SROP, the Social Renewal Operative Program, sets seven priorities. Priority No. 5 is "Building social inclusion, participation," and within this are sub-programs improving chances for children. At the same time, this topic (naturally) also appears in other SROP priorities, such as the school priority (SROP 3) and the health priority (SROP 6). In both there are a dozen or so sub-priorities open to bidding for grant-money, which partly or wholly overlap with the social inclusion priority. There is no mechanism for coordinating these projects which are part of different tenders as far as grant funding is concerned but are nonetheless identical in target and often involve projects covering the same regions. The project world is full of vacuums and overlaps. Vacuums are perhaps unavoidable but counterproductive overlaps could be avoided with different approach.)
- The children's program is generational. The durations of most of the projects range from 6 months to 3 years. In other words, most act as seed-money that can only start up a process. And in most cases the institutions established and/or processes begun end up being unsupported. Little lasting results can be expected from these short term beginnings, while the sudden halt to development is often expressly more damaging than the good we did with the project in the first place. In Szécsény the very visible consequence is mistrust of all projects, deep disappointment on the part of children and families, and even stronger feelings of hopelessness.
- One of the major problems on the project front is that when submitting the bid for grant money, the components of the project need to be set in stone while the social environment is in continuous flux and changes radically over 2 or 3 years. Projects in which all details are set in advance are incapable of responding to even major societal changes such as the crisis or radically changing legislation, and they cannot even manage the new conditions, tensions and demands coming about as a project outcome. Speaking at a conference, Miklós Vecsei, vice president for general issues of the Hungarian Maltese Charities described what happened when receiving *"a comparatively large amount of money, over 300 million forints from the Open Society Institute, to be divided among four settlements, giving them a chance to see how they could handle di-*

viding the money themselves. They were amazed at what happened when they did not have to know what was going to happen three years down the road at the moment they received the grant, whether they would be buying bricks or hiring a mental hygiene professional.”²¹

Above and beyond finding some ways to alleviate the usual problems with grants (huge amounts of paperwork, delayed payments, etc.) it would be vitally important to develop a completely new approach to the principles and methods of projects involving social interventions.

3. Who should the program be serving, who is the target?

All children were targeted by the “Making Things Better for our Children” National Strategy but reducing poverty and exclusion were the priority issues of all components. The program as a whole and each of its elements aimed at fairness in distribution while meeting the basic European principle that when giving certain groups (for instance the Roma) an advantage the targeting should be “explicit but not exclusive.” In this context, the Social Inclusion Strategy states that “Therefore, we deliberately want to maintain this bi-directional approach which involves simultaneously fighting against the impoverishment that Roma are not the only victims of, while if necessary applying specific anti-discrimination programs to improve the lot of the Roma.” We agree with this approach. However, in practice it is hard to find a way of offering more to people who are worse off without anyone else getting hurt.

Are we serving everyone or only the poor?

The debate on universal as opposed to selective benefits has been underway for over a century, with fluctuating outcomes at different times and places. Practice has repeatedly proven that the only way to radically reduce child poverty and prevent its reproduction is through universal benefits, with institutions and services offering high-quality care to all children alike, albeit with high quality selective benefit additions where necessary.²² We also know from experience that even where inequalities are large and the country is poor, it is still a mistake to completely reject universalism despite apparently logical reasons. Instead the two opposing principles need to be combined. Exactly how this combination should work depends on the type of benefit, the regional spread in which it is being applied and many other factors. There is no “one size fits all.”

²¹ Civil report on children, 2012, p.147

²² Illustrations of the wealth of information on this: G. Esping-Anderson: A Child-Centered Social Investment Strategy, in: Why We Need a New Welfare State (with Duncan Gallie, Anton Hemerijck and John Myles). Oxford University Press, 2003; pp. 26-67. Rainwater, Lee & Smeeding, Timothy M. (2005). Poor Kids In A Rich Country: America’s Children In Comparative Perspective. Russell Sage Foundation.

Gradual universalism

If there is a shortage of resources the anti-poverty program cannot be started simultaneously everywhere in the whole country. . Therefore, a gradual approach of some sort is necessary. In given case the choice was regional targeting. The government chose to apply the program to the micro-regions in the worst situations. A government decision made in 2007 defined the disadvantaged (HH) and most disadvantaged (LHH) micro-regions, where the Social Inclusion Programs had to be initiated.²³ This would have been a perfect fit with our principle of “gradual universalism”²⁴ if it had been made clear that poverty and exclusion needed to be treated not only in the 33 LHH micro-regions but eventually had to be combated everywhere (including larger towns and Budapest). Gradual universalism might even be used in a number of other areas (such as setting up an order of schools based on their concrete situations and starting up the programs in those that need it most, etc.).

Group or individual targeting?

Gradual universalism is always targeted towards groups. Depending on the criteria of course, this approach should produce a more neutral effect than would the selection of individuals. It even can be applied in a comparatively tension-free way if the given group has specific needs that would probably lead to poverty but are socially accepted as valid and are comparatively easy to identify. Such groups are, for instance, people with disabilities and families with three or more children. Regional inequalities are also acceptable and for this reason, regional targeting has not triggered tension (to date, at least). If the reason for the poverty conflicts with (easily manipulated) social prejudices, then targeting a group is hazardous. That is the concern – one that is becoming increasingly acute – with the Gypsies, the jobless, the homeless and the “poor,” in a general sense.

Targeting by individual financial need

There are generally about 20,000-40,000 people living in a micro-region, although exceptionally there may be as many as 80,000. Even in the LHH micro-regions, “only” some of the residents are poor. In these micro-regions however, the proportion of children living in poverty is around 50-60 percent²⁵ although it is significantly higher in the segregated settlements. In our view, it is worth making most programs within a given settlement universal. Many local leaders such as mayors and school principals are aware of these tensions. Therefore they often prefer to avoid making distinctions, instead offering all children free school meals or travel to school, or increasing the types of programs everyone can participate in or providing communal spaces made accessible to all. Doing this builds local community cohesion which is also advantageous to the Program to Combat Child Poverty. Nonetheless, there are needs – such as disposable cash income – that we cannot provide on a universal scale (given available funding and the current general mood of the public), so we have to target it towards individuals or families.

²³ Government Decree 311/2007 (XI. 17) Korm.

²⁴ GYEP Short-term Program, Considerations regarding resource distribution – Short-term Program, Appendix 2.

²⁵ Civil report, 2012, p. 107.

However, “appropriate targeting” is slowly drifting away from being one alternative social policy decision and instead is becoming the most important goal. Need must be certified through some sort of means testing, based on an income and usually also an asset test. The problems this gives rise to are as follows:

- Income/assets are hard to measure precisely. If a local community believes that an aid-recipient family has a higher income than reported and is receiving the aid unfairly, it will turn against the family, which can have more or less serious consequences. The most serious and most often-heard generalization is that “they are all” like that (using a Mercedes and wearing heavy gold chains when picking up the assistance).
- When measuring individual need, anyone whose income/assets are even a penny over the threshold are barred from all entitlements (aid, free school meals, etc.). This acts as a counter-incentive not only to taking a job but also to doing any unreported work and is really unfair to those people who make gigantic efforts to keep themselves above the poverty line. This feeling of unfairness turns people who are in a slightly better position against the poor as well as against the policies that bar them from receiving assistance.
- Improving the lot of the Roma is an absolute priority while at the same time, rejection of assistance to the Gypsies based on prejudice is growing. Since this is one of the fundamental components of the program the next subheading will deal separately with the situation of the Roma and their participation in the program. We will investigate at this point only the problems inherent in targeting.

Targeting linked to other than financial conditions

A centuries-old argument is whether financial need is sufficient reason to provide aid or whether a potential recipient must also be “deserving” it. The more poor people there are and the bigger the trouble, the stronger the demand for virtue. In today’s distribution that principle is applied in two ways. One says that if you act in your own or your family’s interests as approved by the state (such as sending your child to school regularly and/or, seeing that the child is inoculated on schedule) then the state will reward you with new cash benefits, “conditional cash transfers.”²⁶ (The English abbreviation, CCT is spreading in many countries.) The other way desert is interpreted is that if you do not comply with something considered desirable by the state, your already existing benefit will be reduced or stopped. Although to date this verbal distinction has not been introduced, we think it should be. **The first could be called an incentive CCT while the latter might be named a sanctioning transfer.**

When the World Bank began introducing the CCT method to the Latin American countries in which there had been no social benefits of any kind, it employed only the incentive transfers since there was nothing that could have been taken away from people. Granted, the bank also sought the “worthy poor,” but since the “non-worthy” would hardly apply.

²⁶ The “Conditional Cash Transfer” was popularized by the World Bank in the developing countries. E.g.: Fiszbein, A. and Schady, N. (2009) Conditional Cash Transfers: Reducing Present and Future Poverty World Bank Publications, ISBN 978-0-8213-7352-1

In Hungary the social, health care and public education systems are quite advanced and for the most part were universally accessible. Therefore, there was little scope for incentive CTT-s. Most likely the government was influenced by the CCT as a concept when it introduced incentive support to send children to pre-school. Poor and uneducated families (families qualified as multiply disadvantaged) receive a specified amount of money every six months if they send their 3 or 4 year-old children to pre-school.²⁷ Stipends linked to ethnic or income conditions are older incentive benefits. At the same time, much as in many other "first world" countries, benefits formerly existing as entitlements (based on the existence of children or on proven unemployment) began to be linked to worthiness. The first of these was the slogan "work for your dole," which demanded community service work from an aid recipient even if there was no work available but which cut off the assistance to people who were unable to find a community service job or who rejected a job offer. The conditions that could bring on sanctions increased and the sanctions themselves became harsher. For instance, two years ago truancy was sanctioned by the suspension of the family allowance that was payed however after truancy ended. Currently it is repealed entirely. Public service work also has a punitive component in that, for instance, a person can lose the opportunity to get a community service job, which equates to loss of unemployment assistance, if he/she violates certain rules. In addition, public work as all forms of assistance are becoming dependent on increasingly invasive conditions (clean home, clean yard, etc.). From the aspect of the program, the return of the "punitive state," also visible on international scale²⁸ is not beneficial, while at the same time, the sanctioning conditions are connected to the increasingly punitive nature of politics. This often leads to, for instance, violations of children's rights.

In our experience, local governments differ in their attitudes. In some places increasingly stringent sanctions are being applied while in others, human dignity is respected, even if people are poor or Gypsies. Sadly, this latter attitude is increasingly rare. The people hurt by the sanctions are giving growing voice to their injuries, although they are not particularly aware of their rights.

²⁷ Multiple studies have been written in the details of the pre-schooling support, the conditions under which it was introduced and its effectiveness. E.g. Autonómia Alapítvány[Autonomy Foundation] [2010]: A 2009. január 1-től bevezetett óvodáztatási támogatás hatásvizsgálata.[In Hungarian] (Impact study of the pre-schooling support introduced on 1 January 2009) In: Ferge, Zs. – Darvas, Á. (Eds.): Gyerekesélyek Magyarországon 2009. (Chances for children in Hungary, 2009) MTA GYEP, Budapest, 2010.

²⁸ Wacquant, Loïc (2009) Punishing the Poor. The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity. John Hope Franklin Center Book. L. Wacquant (2012) The Punitive Regulation of Poverty in the Neoliberal Era. Criminal Justice Matters (London), 89 (September 2012): 38-40.

4. *Integration of the Roma minority*

One basic priority of the program has been the gradual but radical improvement in the situation of the Roma and of chances for Roma children. This goal goes back many long years, with the first such aspirations vocalized in the late 1960s. At the same time, not a single program has managed to achieve a breakthrough. In fact, the funding intended for these programs has been used very ineffectively and often unsuccessfully.²⁹ As opposed to the declared intentions, the exclusion and segregation of the Roma, as well as prejudices against them (in schools and residential communities alike) has become far stronger. The number of schools, settlements and even micro-regions with majority Gypsy populations is on the rise.³⁰

The European Union's integration initiative and the social inclusion strategies designed in connection with it offer more promise than previous efforts for several reasons. One factor is that integration efforts can be funded from the EU Social Fund, which can make things easier for countries short on resources. Thanks to the Open Method of Coordination of the EU greater emphasis is put on legal rights and making people aware of those rights, as well as on democratic cooperation with the Gypsies. Recognition of the significance of local implementation and local services also improves chances of success.

When the work in Szécsény got underway, the Roma priority was in the forefront of the effort. For this reason, we endeavored to achieve cooperation on all levels of the program from the very start, with the goal of having the Roma become active in shaping the program and not just its passive targeted beneficiaries. While success was significant, it was only partial, meaning that we were unable to achieve equal cooperation on all levels.

- As far as the national level was concerned, the Budapest team had long-standing and good relations with many Gypsy professionals, and leaders of Roma organizations. Consultations with them were frequent, and they sometimes served as individual experts and sometimes joined team sessions.
- The situations on micro-regional and local levels were varied.
 - There was not a single Gypsy among the **mayors of the local settlements**. As far as we were able ascertain, Gypsies were rarely invited to local government meetings, even when the agenda included Gypsy issues.
 - On the surface it appeared as though the exclusion of Gypsies from local affairs was countered by the fact that ethnic minorities in Hun-

²⁹ State Auditing Office – Institute for Development and Methodology, 2008. The amount of funding devoted to improving the lot of the Hungarian Gypsies and closing the gap, and the effectiveness of the projects

³⁰ For this see: Kovács, Katalin, *Területi, társadalmi hátrányok és beavatkozási politikák*, 2012, [In Hungarian] (Regional and social disadvantages and intervention policies, 2012) in print, Ladányi, János (2012) *Leselejteztettek*. [In Hungarian] (Removed from circulation) L'Harmattan, Virág, Tünde (2006) *A gettósodó térség* [In Hungarian] (Regional ghettos on the rise). *Szociológiai Szemle*, 1., Virág, Tünde (2010) *Kirekesztve: Falusi gettók az ország peremén* [In Hungarian] (Excluded: Rural ghettos on the outskirts of the country), Akadémiai Publishers

gary, including Gypsies, elect their own **local authorities**. Voters are limited to people who have registered with the minority registry, in other words, who “admit to being Gypsy,” (or Slovak, etc.). Documentary evidence is not required. The basic tasks of the minority authorities are limited to retaining the cultural components of an ethnic identity. Their budgets are minimal. They have no authority regarding political or social issues, local governments are not required to consult with the Roma authority nor do they have to invite a representative when the local representative body debates Gypsy-related issues. The members of the Roma authority have credibility among the local Gypsy community only if they themselves are “credible,” and able to assist financially when needed or to stand up for Gypsy rights. Since individuals like this are rare, the Gypsy authority is not particularly respected either by majority society or by the Gypsies. Nevertheless, we deemed it important to establish contacts with the heads of the Gypsy authority on all important matters. In some settlements this helped if there was a Gypsy community space. They were willing to allow us to use it for programs, obviously on condition that Gypsy children get to participate.

- We endeavored to include **Roma colleagues** throughout the program. The professional coordination of the local program and for a time the management was also in the hands of an outstanding sociologist-social worker-teacher, who also happened to be in the vanguard of the fight for Roma civil rights, and thus served as a model for many. Relying on personal experience and teacher recommendations (sometimes even on local government representatives) we managed to find young Gypsies with the qualifications to handle all local level tasks requiring professionals, or who were able to do so after appropriate training. They served as children’s cottage assistants, school coordinators, study hall teachers or reviewers, and IT mentors. At the end of 2010 nearly 30 percent of the people working at local programs were Roma. Cooperation between the Roma and non-Roma involved with the program was smooth. As far as we know, having Gypsy staff members working in the schools and IT centers did not lead to any conflicts either.

Getting our services to the various groups, in other words, our targets, proved to be much harder. With the (growing) prejudices against the Gypsies, we often heard the argument that the state was assisting the Gypsies at the expense of the “Hungarians.” This served to increase prejudices against the Gypsies. Here the principle of “explicit but not exclusive” becomes particularly important.

However, if we are to know who we are reaching and with what result, we need to first know “who is a Gypsy.” The privacy aspect of the issue has been disputed in Hungary for a long time and is nowhere near resolution. Gyula Pulay, a chief at the State Auditing Office, wrote a seminal study on the issue at the request of the first Evaluation Committee, covering current regulations protecting personal data privacy, the rules banning inclusion of origin/ethnicity in statistics, and possible solutions to the dilemma.

A particular hazard when initiating programs for the poor and particularly for the Gypsies is that the people who are worst off and therefore are least able

to advocate for their interests, will be left out completely. However, if there is no Roma program whatsoever, then – for precisely the above reason – more Gypsies than others will be left out of the programs to assist the poor. To avoid this, Pulay³¹ suggests that *“there is a need to monitor whether state and local government benefits intended for children in general or larger groups of children reach a satisfactory proportion of Roma children and their families,”* Given the data protection problems this might be difficult but in practice, the monitoring of ethnic targeting can be resolved.³² **In the Szécsény Experiment we accepted widely shared opinions about who was Roma, sometimes completed by the opinion of the school or local government. There was no ethnic identification based on self-reports. This targeting method did not create particular tension.** Given the knowledge of the staff in the field and ex post monitoring, we can be sure that there were always a “satisfactory proportion” of Gypsy children participating in the Szécsény Experimental program. In other words, poor and Gypsy children were over-represented in just about every single program.

Intentions to integrate schools and the like are sometimes successful and sometimes they are not. One factor that has been observed is that if the proportion of Gypsy children in a school starts to rise above 30 percent, the other parents transfer their children to a different school, even if it is further away. In the Childrens’ Cottages that had less rigid rules of attendance participation fluctuated. There have also been cases when parents simply avoided one another and the composition of children fluctuated on the basis of which baby carriage got there first. Only in a few cases have mixed groups been sustained on longer term. In the other cases, sometimes there was “spontaneous selection,” and sometimes there wasn’t. Gypsy children made up the majority of study hall participants. Therefore, study halls offered an excellent opportunity to teach and maintain the components of Gypsy culture, such as music and dance. In other cases, when an opportunity was deemed desirable for all – such as a summer camp running under the auspices of the local school – program staff members and teachers managed the applications to constitute a mixed group. Finally, when excursions by bus or summer day camps were organized, it became just about natural for everyone who wanted to (or whose parents wanted them to) participate to appear, although here too, staff did its utmost to see that the poorest families were included. There was a very important lesson to be learned from the effort. **Other than universal or social-insurance based access, there is no automatic mechanism no matter how precise the rules and/or technical methods that can fulfil the intentions of exact targeting,** or to see to it that at least most of the people

³¹ Dr. Gyula Pulay: Possibilities of and the need for registering ethnic origins, 2009. Prepared for the Evaluation Committee. http://www.gyerekesely.hu/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=file&id=16:pulay-gyula-az-etnikai-hovatarozas-szambaveteli-lehetosgei-es-szuksegessge, or http://www.esely.org/kiadvanyok/2009_4/01pulay.pdf

³² Gyula Pulay discusses various ways of maintaining accounts of people of various ethnic groups and offers detailed recommendations for a) targeted anti-poverty programs which are not specified as being Roma programs, b) programs specifically declared Roma programs and c) targeted anti-poverty programs in which the improvement of the lot of the Roma appears as a horizontal target.

entitled to or targeted by the benefit get to take advantage of it.³³ Well qualified and determined service providers and mentors are needed to make sure that the program does not cherry pick among the people in the best positions but sees to it that the people living under the worst circumstances are also included.

The toughest issues were related to the segregated neighbourhoods: whatever the program did there obviously and visibly served the Gypsies and Gypsies only. These were the cases where prejudices to the effect that Gypsies were being helped at the expense of the “Hungarians” were voiced most loudly. This heightened prejudices against the Gypsies. A lesson at one field program of the Szécsény Experiment that may be generalizable is that if a specific intervention or form of help, such as making repairs to homes, is limited to only the Gypsy community the general populace will become seriously upset. In this case the village (and the mayor) called for the same type of repairs to be made to all non-Gypsy families in the village who were in the same circumstances. Acceptance of the demand restored calm. The lesson is that when calculating available resources, this aspect of “explicit but not exclusive” targeting also needs to be considered.

5. Conflicts of values: can attitudes be changed?

Generally, government plans to provide equal opportunities and to desegregate tend to be left half-implemented. In addition to a weak political will and limited resources, efforts have also been thwarted by resistance to local level measures. The resistance is partly the result of local bravado, meaning a determination to maintain “independence” and fight the “wise guy advice” coming from the outside, and in part from their very different attitudes. Part III. of this study and a volume called *Félbeszakadt akciókutatás (Interrupted Action Research) 2012*, which contain detailed accounts of the Szécsény Experiment, offer information on local mistrust of outsiders, and on conflicts of interest and how they play out in practice. At this point we will only touch on a few general problems.

One basic issue is the extent to which the various actors are ready to accept the modern interpretation of the rights of the child, which calls for giving top priority to the principle that everything should happen “in the best interest of the child” Acceptance of this approach is also acceptance of community responsibility.

³³ We need to point out that even with universal or social-insurance-based benefits there will be a few percent who do not access them. However, when it comes to aid, the ratio will be much greater, often as high as or exceeding 50 percent. For more on this, see: EXNOTA Consortium (2006) *Exit From and Non-take-up of Public Services. A comparative analysis: France, Greece, Spain, Germany, Netherlands, Hungary* (2006) http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/06/44/31/PDF/EXNOTA_FINAL_REPORT_MARCH_2006.pdf; Daly, Mary (2002) *Access to Social Rights in Europe: Report*. Council of Europe, 2002; Oorschot, W. van (1998), *Failing selectivity: on the extent and causes of non-take-up of social security benefits* in: H.-J. Andress (Ed.) *Empirical poverty research in a comparative perspective*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 101-132

Another similarly important question is how tolerant or how prejudiced a local community may be. Are there members of the Roma minority there, and what is the attitude towards them of “majority society,” in other words, of the non-Gypsies? Are there poor people and to what extent does the local community hold them responsible for their own plight? Are there people with disabilities and how are they accepted by local society? In the Szécsény micro-region both professionals and the general public were found to be prejudiced against the Gypsies and indifferent to children with disabilities.

Prejudice against Gypsies is not limited to Hungarians. According to the UNDP report already cited³⁴, in 11 countries studied, 6 of which were East European, the ratio of Roma residents over the age of 16 who had experienced discrimination over the course of the preceding year ranged from 25 to 60 percent. In Hungary the ratio was slightly over 40 percent, higher than in Romania and Bulgaria but lower than in the Czech Republic and Poland. (The Western European picture is neither less diverse nor better.)

Reshaping attitudes towards children, among them Gypsy children, is tough. If child-centric and non-exclusion practices are to be implemented, the staff of the institutions dealing with children as well as local society surrounding them should share a value-system, mentalities, attitudes and behaviors that are modern, child-friendly and tolerant in many respects. Sadly, this way of thinking is definitely not widespread in Hungary. (We do not have information on the other East European countries so we can only assume that there is significant variation on the issue from one place to the next.) In Hungary there are many schools that reflect the appropriate attitudes in their operations, and which are focused on the diverse development of children and decent social coexistence, but most are not. Therefore, a great deal of attitude-shaping and mentality adjustment is necessary. Despite efforts to move in the right direction, what we see, sadly, is a growing number of (market-driven) courses, training programs and counseling services promising to “shape attitudes” and modify personalities. How effective they are is rarely monitored, and many of them may not be very effective. On the flip side, we are seeing a rising tendency towards manipulation in the mass media, which often actually reinforces racism. Achieving a change in current practices and outlooks that actually has the interests of children at heart is certain to require a lengthy effort and a wide variety of methods. It will also need a great deal of outside funding and impetus. From the very beginning, we have organized training and outlook-shaping programs for professionals to help reduce prejudices as well as for other reasons (to build contacts, to reinforce cooperation and to promote professional development).

The lessons offered through the detailed descriptions of work in the various professional areas included in the volume *Interrupted Action Research 2012* already mentioned are rather obvious. There are areas, such as roughly the entire social sphere, whose professionals find it hard to accept the need for change. There are

³⁴ UNDP, FRA (2012) The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Survey results at a glance. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/UNDP_Roma_Poverty_Reduction_Roma_Survey.pdf

(probably) specific reasons for this. Their training (including further training) has not always prepared them for self-reflection, self-analysis, or for believing that it might be worthwhile to modify their own practices, methods and attitudes. Supervision cannot work in this direction either for the simple reason that in most places it is non-existent (for instance no funding is provided for supervision). In general, the financial recognition and social prestige of people in these professions is low, although in small settlements a good pediatric home visitor or social worker can be highly respected. The many central changes (often proclaimed as reforms) of the social professions, particularly in the past ten years, have consisted of organizational transformations, financial cutbacks, and an increase in administrative obligations rather than of any reforms in content. These factors lead to reduced self-esteem on the part of the professionals, which makes them vulnerable. Among other uncertainties, they cannot be sure of whether their competencies are up-to-date or how long they will be able to keep their jobs. When these are the basic conditions, people find it very difficult to accept signals from the outside or to see any rationale in altering their outlooks or methods. This means a significant risk of being unable to effect a change in attitudes that could advance the program.

There are professional areas – the school in Szécsény proved to be one of these – where teachers had already been bombarded by outside legions demanding or coercing changes. Here too, we were faced with mistrust of the outside expert, with staff sticking together in defense of one another, and with high levels of prejudice. Nonetheless, in most schools, the principal and some of the teachers were ready to accept a more contemporary outlook and gradually opened up to the opportunities and concepts offered by the program. They found that there were many advantages to employing new methods (such as stronger inclusion of parents, inclusion of master teachers, study halls, and summer day camps to prevent “forgetting” what had been learned during the school year). When we were forced to terminate the professional work we had started, many teachers were not only sorry, but felt it was important for them to continue to operate in the spirit of the program.

The new public education law and outlook is changing this situation. Earlier, emphasis had been on expanding the world known to children, reducing inequalities, developing competences and understanding the individual needs of children. The National Social Inclusion Strategy adopted in 2011 also underlines these principles. (See Box 1.8)

Box 1.8

“The pedagogical attitudes in our schools call for efforts to treat children as individuals, to accept children and students for what they are, to offer them trust, love and empathy, to make demands in keeping with their ages, to monitor compliance with tasks and to provide objective evaluations that guarantee student development. It is the public service responsibility of the Hungarian state to guarantee the right to free and mandatory primary education, free and universally accessible secondary education until graduation exams are passed, and to study until the first trade qualification is obtained.”

“Inclusive school environments and the development of services that promote inclusiveness in support of integrated education that will break the cycle of segregation and disadvantage are to be charged primarily with reducing the school failures of disadvantaged children including Roma children. As emphasized by the “Making Things Better for our Children” National Strategy (2007), ‘in an educational system that creates opportunity, irrespectively of whether they come from a poor and uneducated family, whether they live under poor quality segregated housing conditions, whether they have disabilities, are immigrants or are exceptionally talented, all children must receive educations in line with their talents and conducive to lifelong learning, free from the influence of prejudices, stereotypes, prejudiced expectations or discrimination. Therefore, this must be the top priority for Hungarian education policy.’ In order to reduce the level of exclusion in education, the selectivity of the educational system must be reduced.”

Source: National Social Inclusion Strategy, p. 68-69.

<http://romagov.kormany.hu/download/8/e3/20000/Strat%C3%A9gia.pdf>

Changes introduced since 2010 including a new public education law and completely new demands being made on the schools are making it increasingly difficult to achieve the above goals. The principles and values set forth in the “Making Things Better for our Children” National Strategy and the National Social Inclusion Strategy seem to have disappeared from education policies. The approach taken by the Public Education Act is one example of this, and another is the set of restrictions placed on access to higher education which will affect children’s aspirations way down the line. (It seems fair to ask why a poor or Gypsy child would bother to work harder to gain admission to a university or college, knowing that he or she will never have the money for tuition.) Outlooks are being shaped and prejudices reduced within a system fraught with contradictions, which once again casts doubts on whether the National Social Inclusion Strategy can be successful.

6. Resources and sustainability

Local adaptation of the National Strategy requires significant resources. No matter how successfully international resources (human and professional) can be mobilized, external funds are essential. Since the domestic budget has been steadily cutting back on the funding it provides, European funds, particularly the European Social Funds, will play a decisive role. This is why we have discussed the grant process so extensively. Now, we will study the issue from the aspect of project sustainability.

Sustainability can be interpreted in many ways. In international documents it is a category including the sustainability of society, the environment and the economy. One practical definition is as follows: *(A) A sustainable economic management of natural resources must be combined with the kind of economic development that brings about wellbeing, and with social justice and equal opportunity.*³⁵ Luckily, the economic management of natural resources, a long-neglected category, is being increasingly emphasized. However, at times it appears to have become a mantra voiced automatically but unheard. The Hungarian SROP grant opportunities include a separate (16 page) document on sustainable development³⁶, which in its initial phase still included the requirements for social sustainability and justice (See Box 1.9)

Box 1.9

“The fundamental requirements for sustainable development: social justice based on the guarantee of equal access to opportunities; joint sharing of social responsibilities; efforts to improve quality of life; and sustainable use of natural resources, run hand in hand with environmental awareness and an environmentally ethical behavior on the part of society.”

Source: Guidelines for achieving sustainable development, as part of the grant program initiated by the New Hungary Development Plan for the Operative Program of Social Renewal, 2009

The rest of the document focuses primarily on environmental awareness and how to manage it, while it also discusses specific environmental indicators, offering 9 primary and 7 secondary considerations that include checking to see whether project institutions offer environmentally gentle approaches or reductions in waste materials.³⁷ This strong emphasis on environmental sustainability, which dominates other horizontal requirements in the powerful way it is stressed, is, we think, problematic for two reasons. One is that the way sustainability is emphasized is not really

³⁵ This is one example: http://www.nfu.hu/kormany_atal_elfogadott_nemzeti_fenntarthato_fejlodesi_strategia

³⁶ Guidelines for achieving sustainable development, as part of the grant program initiated by the New Hungary Development Plan for the Operative Program of Social Renewal, 2009

³⁷ The disproportionate emphasis that ignores project content is not found throughout Europe. The interpretation of sustainability is more balanced in applications for grants from the Norwegian Fund or the EEA.

connected to other requirements that are also priorities, such as social justice or improving quality of life. (The connection is not apparent even when, for instance, the requirement for social justice appears in other horizontal priorities related to equal opportunity.) The other is that there is less information than necessary on the sustainability of project outcomes or of the flows they initiate, and on related difficulties and requirements. This is the biggest problem of practical implementation.

In principle *"The key condition for EU supports is that the project outcomes must be sustained for specific periods of time."*³⁸ Unfortunately, for the moment there are no guidelines in project literature concerned with the consequences of a project afterlife or of suspending it (giving it up). Some projects include sustainment as an integral part of their tasks. The requirement to sustain an institution or services for 'x' number of years using the funds stipulated by the grant applicant might become a funding prerequisite. Most likely the grant providers are aware that future sustainment of an institution or of services is so uncertain that they don't always include sanctions for projects that are not sustained. Employment or training programs might include a requirement – signaling sustainability in one sense – for program participants "that on the 180th day following conclusion of the individual program" 'x' percent of the initial number should be employed or should have graduated from the program. (Sanctions are rare here, even for non-performance.) Even if it is not a grant condition, the basic need of the people conducting the program should be to see their work bear fruit and to want it to continue, in other words, to obtain funding in one way or another to continue the program.

The question then becomes how to obtain sustainable funding and from whom. For economic or technical development projects, short-term self-sustainment and profitability might be an adequate objective. However, in the vast majority of cases when the transformation of social relations or the development of human resources is the target, only the long term can produce the type of profit that can be directly or indirectly channeled into social development. On shorter term, chances to obtain funding appear to be as follows:

- If it is possible to demonstrate that an institution or a process already underway fits into a state development concept for which budget resources are available, then allocated support might become attainable, which would sustain an institution or service. This is partly what happened with the Sure Start Children's Cottages. Proposals were also made for the study halls, summer daycare programs and community centers but – despite a measure of support from the ministry – these programs were not supported.
- The people running the project need to start looking for additional resources in the form of either allocated or competitive grants while the project is still being financed by its original source. Unfortunately, the project activities themselves overloaded the MTA GYEP Office so severely that it had no capacity to build this type of relationship.
- In a lucky situation there may be internal resources in the micro-region or local players might be sufficiently interested to seek out ways of sustaining projects. In the real world it may happen that the government of a settlement is

³⁸ Op. cit, Point 2.2., p.6

willing to cover the costs of an institution or service on long term. However it is well nigh impossible for there to be sufficient local resources to maintain micro-regional programs or for local actors to continue running a full and complex program. Many factors are involved here ranging from the micro-regional identity to the permanent shortage of resources to conflicts of interests, but the main reason is that the settlement or micro-region does not feel that the project “belongs to them.”

- The most satisfying solution would be if the project itself could establish some sort of money-making institution within itself during the period when funding is being provided. One of the world’s most successful local programs combating child poverty is the Harlem Children’s Zone (which began operating on a limited scale in 1970 and has maintained a complex program since 1990). It has operated primarily on donations with some federal funding. The leadership’s future plans call for increasing the existing foundation to a level at which a portion of the returns would be sufficient to cover one-quarter of the program’s operative costs. That would provide a basis for sustainability and long term operation.³⁹ Of course, one has to assume that an autonomous civil sphere exists and that the ability to attract funding from it is part of the general culture. One also has to assume the freedom of the civil organisations to combine the solicitation and receipt of major donations with funding from grants and on occasion, with contributions from the government.

In Hungary, for the moment it looks rather impossible to establish a fund anywhere near to that size for our particular cause. One way to create funds on a much more modest scale might be to turn to the instruments of the social economy and to run a cooperative within (or alongside) the program. It would have to manage its profitable “market-based” activity and its short-term “non-productive” (more precisely non-profit) service-type activity as a single unified entity. In other words, these entities would have to operate as cooperatives with a business outlook but would not be aiming to attain maximum profits. Instead, they would be economic units striving to meet local demands in diverse ways, which in an ideal situation would generate profits that could be rolled back into the program. In Szécsény such a cooperative was established, but has been difficult to stabilize because of local and general uncertainties.⁴⁰

Long term sustainability for social projects, particularly for the kind offering multiple services, appears to be just about impossible in Hungary and most likely anywhere in Eastern Europe. That makes uncannily relevant the question we have often put to ourselves: *“Should we even begin a social intervention program if we cannot foresee or calculate how to finance it on short and medium term, and if we cannot be certain of any longer term commitment, on at least medium if not longer term? The question is just as valid for the National Strategy as it is for local programs or projects. We do not*

³⁹ http://www.hcz.org/hcz/downloads/path_to_sustainability.pdf

⁴⁰ The cooperative managed the IT component of the program quite successfully and became involved with a micro-regional waste management project, which now appears to be collapsing following 3 years of major developments. The risk of failure has been heightened by the fact that the government is planning to nationalize waste management.

know the answer. Halting a program that began well midway through it can cause more damage than benefit. Nonetheless, in an uncertain and troubled world where poverty and child poverty are socially painful issues, anxiety over the future must not be allowed to paralyze all endeavors to improve matters. Navigare necesse est.”⁴¹

7. Locals and experts from the outside and from above

To implement the program to combat child poverty on local scale there is a need for people from “above” to change the situation but nothing will actually happen unless they are accepted on local level and locals are ready to cooperate. The Szécsény Experiment – given that it was the first such experiment – was unable to avoid having experts “from the outside” play a significant role. Given that hardly anyone in the region had heard about the program, it had to be publicized and public opinion as well as the professionals participating had to be prepared for the changes. There was no doubt here that people coming in from the outside were essential. When expanding the micro-regional program our experience was similar: it was absolutely necessary to have professionals from the outside working to see that the program on the whole was accepted.

According to ex post analyses, there truly were multiple program tasks for which it was advantageous for someone from the “outside” to step in and join the effort. To go into a bit more detail on the most important functions of the outsider:

- The outsider can *get people to learn about the project*, his/her function is to introduce and popularize it. In Szécsény, specialists from the Academy of Science’s Children’s Program Office (GYEP) and specialists commissioned by the Office did this job. Professionals from the GYEP Program Office also handled the extension effort, working quite well as regional coordinators and experts. The introductory phase lasts several months (in Szécsény it lasted for four). The professionals participating in the program at that point were all from the “outside.” It is possible to do this work without triggering conflicts.
- *Publicity and program extension*: The program needs a PR specialist even after it gets underway. The job is to offer a constant flow of information on the project, to attract the media and provide it with information, to manage publicity on program extension, to popularize the program and to organize professional conferences (Three nationwide conferences were organized during the Szécsény Experiment). The PR person uses his/her network to bring the outside world to the locals by inviting guests (including artists and other professionals) to add spice to the lives of the children and all local residents. In this case the person does not have to be an outsider. However, the GYEP Office had the advantage of a PR professional who intensively participated in

⁴¹ Interrupted action research, 2012. p. 24.

teamwork, had a good feel for local needs and possibilities, and included all this into the PR effort. There is not necessarily any friction between outside and local personnel when it comes to PR operations.

- *An outside professional for the transmission operations.* Transmission is a task that operates in two directions. On the one hand, the person charged with this task transmits program standards to, and shares information with, local residents. On the other, he or she feeds whatever experience he or she gains into his/her own work and that of the team as a whole (to facilitate monitoring, the updating and “rolling planning” of both local and nationwide programs). In both cases the essence of the job is continuity. In principle, the role of the experts is never finished. The work content is designed by the professional doing the job (as described in the volume, *The Tale of Interrupted Action Research*, 2006-2011). As they are becoming increasingly acquainted with the field they are the ones best able to find out what components from their arsenal of tools is needed in a given case, who is ready to receive what, where necessary resources can be found, and how best to adjust to change. There are any number of lessons that can be learned from the work of the outside professionals of the team.
- A good “outside” expert plays a key role in the program. That person is perhaps the most important direct influence on local-level changes and developments carried through in the spirit of the program. In this case being an outsider is a huge advantage because he or she will not become involved in local conflicts of interests. Nonetheless – as we can see from the details – the outsider’s activity can conflict with the interests of local players. These are the conflicts that are hard to resolve.
- In some areas (such as IT) a single outside expert is sufficient because, helped by the mentors he or she can cover an entire micro-region. However, in order to improve school or personal social services, it would have been a huge advantage to have been able to employ several experts with different professional skills.
- The organizational framework of the GYEP Office allowed us to bring our experts together once a week to meet and exchange experiences. Once the extension process got underway, regional coordinators and experts also joined in some of these meetings. Despite that, we felt it necessary to organize several-day-long get-togethers about once a year to go over the processes including past, present, and future and interpret them together. We may not have taken sufficient advantage of these meetings of experts, for instance, in clarifying the requirements of a complex intervention. But they were a great help in giving us an overview of the process and in turning local experiences into transferable knowledge.
- *“Invited coaches and artists”.* Whenever working on human development, it is worth introducing impulses from the outside to enrich the program. Children in particular need to have their worlds expanded albeit offering models and exciting events to adults also has numerous advantages. Among the outside coaches working in the Szécsény program was a master teacher who spent quite a bit of time there and gave the local teachers a great deal of help. There also were several training session coordinators, whose programs covered issues ranging

from community development to combating drugs. The program included three conferences organized for experts, with participants from all over the country. The third conference, which concluded the four-year effort, included the presence and talk of two well-known writers (Závada Pál and Part Nagy Lajos), an exhibition of socio-photos, a presentation of documentary films, an exhibition by Gypsy painter János Horváth, and a concert by folk singer Bea Palya. The children were entertained by Judit Halász, an actress and singer whose repertoire is geared towards children. In addition, musicians were invited to entertain them to celebrate St. Nicholas Day. Film director and producer András Salamon organized a cinematic school for children and adolescents at Magyargéc, a small settlement in the Szécsény micro-region, which morphed into a highly successful documentary film called "Ten Years from Now" (<http://www.frequency.com/video/ten-years-from-now-film-by-andras/68045069>). Most of the artists joined us as volunteers and refused to accept any remuneration for their services.)

Outside monitors. We have offered detailed information on the functions of these professionals in the section on "Measuring." Sadly, at this time independent outside monitoring is not part of the government strategy. (In case of Szécsény, there were two outside monitoring events, both organised from abroad. Neither was paid from the program's budget or from domestic funds. There will be more details on this in the next section of this study.) While not detailed here we also thought it important to have some outside monitoring controlling and supporting the Budapest team, the Academy of Science's GYEP Office. In absence of funds we replaced formal monitoring by regularly organized meetings on various topics to which we invited specialists from other areas.

8. Measuring projects and programs

When conducting measurements we had to meet two conflicting requirements. On the one hand, we needed to know as much as possible about how the project operated and how close it was to meeting its targets, about what counted as success and what qualified as failure, and about its social effectiveness on shorter and longer term. On the other, we could not allow our measurements to cost too much or to bring about excessive bureaucracy and large amounts of paperwork. There is no way to resolve that conflict. We have found that we have not been too good either in finding adequate solutions. In the following we will highlight the most important methods along with the related difficulties.

Preparing and calculating indicators

Indices are important formalized or standardized components of monitoring. One basic problem with them is that short-term programs need short-term indicators. For that reason, most of the mandatory indicators that have to be completed as project requirements are really formal although project performance and sometimes funding depend on meeting them. Very rarely do they coincide with the information we really need to obtain.

When it comes to sets of content indicators measuring trends in child poverty, standardization is a central issue. Were indicators standardized it would be possible to make regional or chronological comparisons. The Monitoring Committee started to work out such a set of indicators (see Table 1). Under current plans this work will continue, but for the moment we do not have any information on outcomes. Official and civil reports have published the series of indicators between 2006 and 2010 that have been available.⁴² For the most part the various official statistical indicators are not adequately grouped for analytical purposes, for instance the breakdowns for instance, by the presence and number of children in a family, ages of the children, income, etc.) are often missing Table 1.1

Table 1 Indicators of trends in child poverty on a nationwide scale, 2010		
INDICATOR	SOURCE⁴³	PROBLEM
A. Improving employment and the labor market situation		
A1. Proportion of households with no earner	LFS and SILC	No breakdown
A2. Proportion of people living in households with no earner	LFS and SILC	No breakdown
A3. Unemployment rate	LFS and SILC	
A4. Proportion of people living in household of unemployed person	LFS and SILC	No breakdown
A5. Long-term unemployment rate	LFS and SILC	
A6. Proportion of people living in household of long-term unemployed person	LFS and SILC	Unavailable
A7. Very long-term unemployment rate	LFS	
A8. Proportion of people living in household of person unemployed on very long term	LFS	Low number of cases
A9. Proportion of people with part-time jobs	LFS	
A10. Proportion of people living in household of person with part-time job	LFS	Low number of cases
A11. Proportion of 15-17-year-olds not working and not in school	SILC	Low number of cases
B. Developing benefits to improve the financial situation of families with children		
B1. Ratio of people living in relative poverty: below 60% of the median	SILC	
B2. Poverty rates at preset threshold value	SILC	Not relevant
B3. Proportion of people living in long-term poverty	SILC	Earliest data, 2012
B4. Relative poverty gap	SILC	
B5. Ratio of people living in poverty not counting social benefits	SILC	
B6. Ratio of people living in poverty not counting means-tested benefits	SILC	Not available
C. Meeting the basic needs of children and families, deprivation		
C1. Proportion of households/persons - who have great difficulties making ends meet	HBS/SILC	
C2. – who lack sufficient funds for food	HBS/SILC	
C3. – who have unpaid utility bills from the past year	SILC	Not available

⁴² Farkas, Zsombor: Indicators reporting on the situations of the children of Hungary and families with children, 2006-2010 (In Hungarian), Civil report on children, 2012 p. 61-102 (In Hungarian) www.gyere.net ; Report on implementation of the 2011 tasks of the "Making Things Better for our Children" National Strategy's Evaluation Committee, (In Hungarian) <http://romagov.kormany.hu>

⁴³ LFS – Labour Force Survey, SILC Statistics on Income and on living conditions, HBS – Household Budget Survey, KSH – Hungarian Central Statistics Office, SzMM – Ministry of Social and Labor Affairs

C4. – where it has happened that there was not sufficient money in the household to purchase necessary medication for a sick household member	SILC	
C5. – where there was not enough money to purchase medication for a sick child	SILC	
C6. Proportion of children with a PC in their homes	SILC	
D. Improving housing conditions, quality, security		
D1. Number of people living in homes without a bathroom	HBS/SILC	No breakdown
D2. Number of people living in homes without an indoor toilet	HBS/SILC	No breakdown
D3. Number of people living in overcrowded homes	HBS/SILC	No breakdown
D4. Nature of neighborhood	HBS/SILC	Not compiled
D5. Ratio of poverty regarding type of entitlement to the home	HBS/SILC	No breakdown
D6. Ratio of households in rental housing	HBS/SILC	No breakdown
D7. Ratio of homes with market values amounting to less than 50% of the median	HBS/SILC	No breakdown
E. Developing talents/abilities, institutions and services helping children be successful at school, elimination of segregation		
E1. Ratio of 0-5-year-olds in day care	Relevant institution	
E2. Number of settlements without crèches and/or preschools	Relevant institution	
E3. Proportion of preschool groups with more than 25 children in them	Relevant institution	
E4. Proportion of preschoolers in disadvantaged situations	Relevant institution	
E5. Proportion of school children in after-school care	Relevant institution	No breakdown
E6. Ratio of special needs (SNI) students	Relevant institution	
E7. Ratio of special needs schoolchildren (SNI) in integrated classrooms	Relevant institution	
E8. Ratio of secondary school students attending secondary schools	Relevant institution	
E9. Ratio of 16-17-year-olds in secondary school	SILC	
E10. Dropout rate	LFS	
E11. Student performance	PISA survey	
E12. The impact of family characteristics on student performance	PISA survey	
E13. Ratio of people with low education levels	LFS	
F. Developing personal and specialized services targeting families with children		
F1. Ratio of trained professional social personnel among staffs providing social and child welfare services	KSH, SzMM	Cannot be calculated
F2. Proportion of children in transitional care	KSH, SzMM	No breakdown
F3. Proportion of children in transitional care who have been in such care for longer than one year	KSH, SzMM	No breakdown
F4. Ratio of children in child protection care	KSH	No breakdown
F5. Number of children per social services professional	KSH	
F6. Number of children and families cared for by these services	KSH	No numbers of families
G. Assuring a healthier childhood		
G1. Ratio of premature/preterm (low birth weight) birth	KSH	
G2.1 Infant mortality	KSH	
G2.2 Child mortality	KSH	
G3. Ratio of pregnancy among minors	KSH	
G4. Ratio of overweight, obese children	KSH	
G5. Subjective health status of adolescents, self-reported	Survey	
G6. Ratio of adolescents who regularly smoke cigarettes	survey	
G7. Ratio of pregnant women who smoke cigarettes during pregnancy	KSH	
G8. Ratio of children with chronic illnesses among same age cohort		No source for data
G9. Ratio of children with intact teeth		No data collected

Collecting background information before and after the start of the program. Before starting local work a micro-regional descriptive report (which we called local mirror) had to be prepared. It was based on desk research using a wide variety of sources and methods, and also, if possible, interviews.⁴⁴ GYEP initially designed the method and used it successfully for the first 11 micro-regions included in the project. If there is time and opportunity, it is worth continuously supplementing the initial data. That way a very useful database can be brought about without any significant extra costs. Unfortunately, given the usual shortage of funds and time we were unable to systematically update the initial report.

Survey of social conditions in the area related to the program. We think that household surveys in the micro-regions can help a great deal in understanding the flows and monitoring them. By this we mean conducting surveys using questionnaires among households with children. GYEP – when possible – conducted this kind of survey in Szécsény every two years and eventually managed to have the method accepted in the other involved micro-regions. The thematic blocks of the questionnaires we designed can be rotated and expanded. This research monitors the whole of the flows occurring in the areas where the intervention takes place, showing us, for instance, how the income situation, or the poverty, the registration of children in school, the debt situation and the like evolved over time in the micro-region. These data not only show us program progress but also the changes in the local society affected by the program, which in turn lets us know how the program is working, whether it is doing any good, and what might need to be changed.

Monitoring various sub-project and components

In principle we should be able to keep tabs on all project components that can be clearly defined, gathering data primarily on local participation and the effects of a given component. It would be easy to measure *participation* if estimates about the number of people present at an event or a list of their signature were sufficient. Unfortunately these data are not very informative. Any additional information is, though, time-consuming and heightens bureaucracy. With Szécsény it took us quite a while to figure out why we need information and how much do we need – to meet external and our own expectations. The external expectations had to be met more urgently than our own. Regular data collection included age, whether the participant was disadvantaged, and the frequency with which he or she used our services.

That information is useful but does not necessarily tell us how effective and successful the service is. Nonetheless, we had to make do with this since there was a high level of resistance to the extra work involved with collecting the data. We even had a hard time convincing our staff that we were not using the information to monitor their work. We managed to evolve tools making deeper reaching evaluations possible in roughly the fourth year of the program. (See Boxes 10 and 11)Box 10

⁴⁴ See e.g. www.gyerekesely.hu, and <https://sites.google.com/site/523help/kistersegek-tamogatasa/kistersegi-tuekoer>

Data sheet showing monthly use of services

ID	Gender	Year of birth	Month of birth	Residence, settlement	Education level of mother	Nov.2., Tuesday	Nov.3. Wednesday	Nov.4. Thursday	Nov.5 Friday	...
1.										
2.										
3.										
4.										
5.										
...										
...										

Box 11

Development information (Taken every three months)

Gender

Date and place of birth

Address

How long has child been coming to Children's Cottage?

How has child adjusted, how often does he/she attend Children's Cottage sessions?

Physical development level: Satisfactory – Physically weak - Strong

Sensory organs: appear healthy - some type of disorder noticed

Relationship to others: Initiates – Accepts - Avoids

Conduct: Calm - Varied - Agitated

Awareness of task, implementation: Determined – Will join others – Easily distracted – Independent

Attention span: Long – Short

Memory: Reliable, accurate – inaccurate, incomplete

Major motor skills: Coordination satisfactory – Unsatisfactory

Holds pencil: Using standard method – Using other method – Rigidly

Use of pencil: Exerts pressure – does not exert pressure – rigid – relaxed

Other fine motor activity: Clumsy – Well coordinated

Sense of direction: Good – Not good – Mixes up directions

Lateral skills: Right handed – Left handed – Has not yet developed

Current information level: Satisfactory – Incomplete

Ability to accept new information: Satisfactory – Takes time – Has hard time

Problem-solving ability: Good – Undeveloped

Mathematics ability: Mechanical counting – Has concept of numbers to x

Language, verbal skills: Coherent – has difficulty finding right words; comprehensible-monotone, mumbles; rhythmic – lacks rhythm

Vocabulary: Poor – Satisfactory – Rich; Use of grammar is age-appropriate

Poems: Learns them easily – Has hard time learning them

Impact studies differ by component and each requires a separate method. In many cases – for instance, when monitoring the development of children’s competencies – measurement requires such a high level of human and financial resources that after a few attempts we abandoned the effort in, for instance, the Children’s Cottages. In some cases we managed to obtain data that substituted for our own measurements, such as the results of school competency tests that are officially required, which we used for internal monitoring. An additional difficulty with the impact studies is that they only can measure the impact of a project while it is underway (except for certain extensions already mentioned). This is a regular problem that appears in among other places, when measuring indicators.

Collecting data while conducting internal monitoring would be really effective if the data of the persons or families affected by the services in various areas could be connected with information coming from other sources (individual data identified and linked to specific persons. That data could contain school grades, absences, and access to aid combined with a sign-in sheet showing involvement in the program and would really tell us something about how effective the program component is). The idea of having program participants use an electronic card to access the services came up as one technical solution to this dilemma. However, all of these possible solutions become very questionable because of data protection considerations.

Comprehensive (complex) external and internal monitoring

Our comprehensive internal monitoring took place through the surveys we conducted bi-annually, the results of which were regularly made public. We interviewed 500-600 families with children for these surveys, which gave us a comparatively sensitive picture of changes in the most important indicators. We published data collected from four micro-regions for the 2009-2011 time frame in our 2011 Civil Report⁴⁵, which showed that during this period there was a significant increase in child poverty, while an analysis of the Szécsény data showed that – most likely thanks in part to the program – several flows evolved in a relatively favorable manner (See Table 2).

Table 2. *Proportion of children living in poverty** as defined by the demographic and social specifics of the family (%)*

Number of children	2009	2011	Change (2009=100)
1 child in family	32	42	130
2 children in family	37	41	110
3 children or more in family	58	72	125
Ethnicity			
Roma family	68	82	121
Non-Roma family	29	34	119
Labor market status of household			
On primary labor market	22	27	125
On alternative labor market	70	84	120
Has no work	83	87	105

*Poverty: under 60% of the equivalent median income (scale OECD2) Source: Civil Report

⁴⁵ The data was collected in the Baktalórántház, Bátorfyereny, Heves and Sásd micro-regions

There has been no external Hungarian monitoring (for instance, done at the request of the government) since the Szécsény Experiment got underway. There were two instances of foreign monitoring in 2010. The Norwegian and EEA Grant, which supported the Szécsény Experiment, conducted a monitoring process using a specialist firm and essentially covered formal issues (finances, public procurement issues, adherence to deadlines, performance of indicators). This monitoring process did not concern itself with qualitative issues. (See Box 12)

Box 12

Activities regarding establishment of the children's houses (renovation, installment of kitchen units, kitchenware, bathroom equipment, furniture, toys), study halls (renovation, procurement of furniture, school supplies), community spaces and IT points (renovation, procurement of furniture) are finished. The hired staff is working on implementation of activities. No public procurement procedure was required with regard to these activities, therefore implementation proceeded smoothly. Activities involving training services and IT equipment have been delayed. The two (2) public procurement procedures have not been finished yet. The public procurement procedure for IT equipment has been launched. Procurement of trainings services has not been launched yet, because the national law regarding the public procurement procedures was changed of 15th September. Therefore implementation of the training activities has not commenced, the equipment for the IT points has not been supplied.

Note:⁴⁶

Peer review, organized by the EU within the framework of an open coordination mechanism⁴⁷ was a completely different type of monitoring and involved the participation of specialists from six countries. This monitoring project involved visiting the sites, meeting with local people and several roundtables with various experts. The participants in the peer review gave the experiment high marks and were of the opinion that it is possible to halt the passing on of poverty from one generation to the next, even in the most disadvantaged areas. (See Box 13)

⁴⁶ Detailed Monitoring Report of Project HU0051: The Szécsény Program to Give Kids a Chance, prepared by Sanita Vanaga (SAFEGE Baltija) on 27.09.2010, p.12

⁴⁷ The program was headed by Spanish social policy expert José Manule Fresno and the entire document can be found at „Promoting social inclusion of children in a disadvantaged rural environment - the micro-region of Szécsény” címen (<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2010/promoting-social-inclusion-of-children-in-a-disadvantaged-rural-environment-the-micro-region-of-szecsény>)

Box 13

Hungary's "Making Things Better for our Children" National Strategy and the related pilot programme in the micro-region of Szécsény were hailed by peer reviewers gathered in Budapest on 27-28 May 2010 as a sign that the inter-generational transmission of poverty can be overcome, even in the most disadvantaged regions. (Newsletter 3) Thanks to its democratic, participative, collaborative and comprehensive approach, the programme has proven successful and its nationwide dissemination has begun. Hungary hopes to share its experience with other Member States and to contribute to the development of guidelines for future local/micro-regional programmes for combating poverty and social exclusion, particularly of Roma children

Note: ⁴⁸

Action research

We had not planned on the Szécsény experiment being an action research project. However, after about 2 years of operation we realized that the transmission tasks could be managed as action research, which would enable us to record and transfer the methods employed. In addition, continuation of the work would become less tied to any individual. Following the many preceding events, we interpreted action research as research connected to a practice with its own specific methodology. In it the researcher (in our case the outside expert or coordinator) works in close cooperation with local partners who are also the targets of the research (representatives of the individuals and/or organizations participating in the project). The job is to register all experience and make use of it on the one hand when analyzing the expert's own practices and on the other when transferring it as feedback to the research team or when passing it on to the program as a whole. Satisfactory tools must be available to collect the data, and to analyze and use the information. By the time we began extending the program to the other micro-regions we had designed the first tools that the micro-region coordinators could make use of. In the journals they kept they carefully recorded their activity in a multi-faceted way, registered the feedback, conflicts, the need to make changes, and the like). Sadly, the program was interrupted and so no further analytical tools were designed.

⁴⁸ <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2010/promoting-social-inclusion-of-children-in-a-disadvantaged-rural-environment-the-micro-region-of-szecsény>

III. MICRO-REGIONAL ORGANIZATION OF THE CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

The experimental local implementation of the National Strategy in the Szécsény micro-region began in the summer of 2006. Preparations for extending it to additional micro-regions began at the end of 2007. Implementation of the program in the first five⁴⁹ of the integrated Chances for Children programs, which had been targeted at 23-26 micro-regions⁵⁰ began in the summer of 2010. (See Table 3)

Table 3.
Important data concerning the micro-regional programs

Micro-region	Population capita (2010)	No. of settlements	Preparation and startup year	Start of implementation	Closing date	Amount of support, HUF
Szécsény	20,435	13	2006	10.2006.	04.30.2011.	550,000,000
First round micro-regions						
Baktalórántháza	34,162	19	2008	04.01.2011.	03.31.2014.	49,241,510
Bátonyterenye	23,880	14	2008	12.01.2010.	11.30.2013.	537,684,705
Heves	33,688	17	2008	03.01.2011.	10.31.2013.	571,146,875
Kistelek	18,281	6	2008	11.01.2010.	10.31.2013.	423,413,751
Sásd	13,893	27	2008	01.01.2011.	12.31.2013.	562,926,275
Second round micro-regions						
Csenger	13,182	11	2010	05.01.2012.	04.30.2015.	561,360,470
Jánoshalma	15,959	4	2010	05.01.2012.	04.30.2015.	428,935,827
Mezőcsát	13,814	9	2010	05.01.2012.	04.30.2015.	553,228,771
Ózd	66,788	29	2010	08.01.2012.	07.31.2015.	470,620,127
Sarkad	22,573	11	2010	05.01.2012.	04.30.2015.	540,805,287
Szigetvár	25,985	46	2010	08.01.2012.	07.31.2015.	437,152,941

The former GYEP staff members have direct experience with the **Szécsény Experiment** and with the **regional extension** to the first round of micro-regions. We have summarized that experience in the following.

⁴⁹ The integrated Chances for Children program running within the framework of the SROP 5.2.3. project was introduced to the following five micro-regions: Bátonyterenye, Heves, Kistelek, Baktalórántháza, and Sásd.

⁵⁰ The government plan of action connected to the National Strategy included 10 micro-regional programs between 2007 and 2010 using EU resources. Later, this was increased to 11 and then, following the change in government administration, the idea of including another 12-15 micro-regions was raised. Currently (autumn 2012) the program is being implemented in 11 micro-regions while applications from another 5 micro-regions have been accepted, with implementation scheduled to begin in January 2013. Applications from another 10 micro-regions have been received and are under review.

1. *The point of departure*

The nature of project *mandate* and *financing* can alter the fundamentals of the implementation process. The Szécsény Experiment began as a 25-year generational program. However, although the **micro-regional extension** had been envisioned as running for a similar length of time, it was reduced to a concrete three-year project when applying for grant money.

Both processes (the Szécsény Experiment and the micro-regional programs) started out the same way. Professionals from the outside, GYEP staff members visited the micro-regions and tried to win them over, to include and prepare them in the effort to combat child poverty on local level. Differences were nevertheless significant.

The **Szécsény Experiment** began at a time when the government was still strongly committed politically to programs to combat child poverty and when efforts to prepare the National Strategy were very much underway. This was a period in which professionals helping with implementation were enthusiastic, and when the micro-regions were ready to deal with the challenge of the social experiment. It was the time of great expectations. The organization, operating under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, offered GYEP staff a high level of authority and credibility during their field work. In our experience, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences is one of the declining number of public institutions that have maintained the public's respect, so the scientific backdrop symbolized by its name increased confidence in the program. (The Harlem Program mentioned earlier was helped by a similar association with Harvard University.) Program preparations and provisions for the professional backing were in the hands of the GYEP team from the very first moment. However, organizational issues regarding micro-regional participation had not been regulated. The program did not have earmarked funds and at the start of the experiment the implementation funds were not visible.

Extension to the micro-regions using EU funds began after the National Strategy was adopted. By 2008, however, we were already feeling the effects of economic downturn as the political backing for the fight to combat child poverty got weaker and its social priority essentially came to a screeching halt. But, by this time the experience of the **Szécsény Experiment** was available and implementation could be prepared. The GYEP staff therefore began work as regional coordinator of the very gradually evolving regional team for micro-regional operations.⁵¹ In this construct the funding was available and was a known quantity. Each micro-region had 400-600 million forints in support earmarked for its operation during the three years of the program. Under the terms of the grant, the micro-regional associations got a

⁵¹ As far back as 2007, the staff of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences GYEP program continuously but very gradually expanded to include a working group whose job was to prepare and support extension to the micro-regions and included regional coordinators and regional experts. The organizational structure meshed with the need to provide a backdrop of design, research and methodology for the micro-regions and made it possible to think and cooperate as a team in the concrete programs of the micro-regions.

them and the monitoring and supervision are⁵³. The smaller settlements in the micro-regions were weaker in trying to assert the interests, while the segregated, ghetto-like settlements within the associations were neglected. At the same time, conflicts of interest and personal animosity within human services had the power to detour significant elements of the intervention process that truly was adjusted to needs and contained appropriate priorities. We have noticed a number of signs of this. Nevertheless, despite the experience we think it is inconceivable to design and implement a longer term children's program/strategy without local decision-makers and institutions playing a defining role. (See Textbox 14)

Box 14

"Rivalry between settlements is typical. The dominance of the settlement represented by the association chair (center of the micro-region) was found to be typical even if the micro-region had only a few settlements (such as 4 or 6). The power hierarchy appeared quite strongly and was heightened by possession of information and centralization of funds. The small settlements that are the most vulnerable have the lowest human capacities and weakest infrastructures. They start off from the weakest position in a planning and development process calling for funding distribution and funding procurement within a competitive application system." (From the action research journal of a regional coordinator)

In the **Szécsény Experiment**, this micro-region principle was combined with the participation of "outside civilians". The decisive step in affirming the role of the micro-region was establishment of micro-regional children's committees and subcommittees back in 2008. However, this type of grass roots operation makes a program like this vulnerable. The uncertain nature of funding, vulnerability to political interests and political games, and the forced interruption of the project much earlier than intended can put an end to any development even if the local public, professional or decision-maker opinions are that it is important and necessary.

We simply do not know which way is more effective. The disadvantage of operating from the top down is that the inclusion of the civil sphere is always delayed or limited which means that civil supervision is also delayed or weak. Operating from the bottom up takes a longer time before the local people who need to take responsibility are identified. It appears necessary to conduct an analysis of both approaches over a longer time frame to come up with an answer. The micro-regional projects are underway, and we have no idea what their afterlives will look like. The sudden halt to the Szécsény Experiment will make a comparative analysis later on impossible, too. So, all we can do is describe the dilemma.

⁵³ When GYEP was disbanded the micro-regions lost their footing on seeing the uncertainties among the regional coordinators and experts who until then had played comparatively sure roles. Meanwhile the competencies of the priority program employing them (SROP 5.2.1) were questioned, which particularly hurt the staff of the organization (WSA) that took over the work of professionally preparing and supporting micro-regional extension. (On occasion, for instance they called in outside companies that specialized in writing bids, which prepared formally acceptable bids that were not necessarily good in their content.)

2. Preparations, inclusion of local players, conflicts in attitudes

The Szécsény Chances for Children program was begun following several meetings with the mayor and association chief, when having agreed on a date, we held the first “big” meeting, a really heavily attended community discussion in the autumn of 2006. Local decision-makers from practically all settlements in the micro-region were represented as were a number of human services professionals and several civil organizations, all taking part in a discussion in which ideas for the program were presented. We also conducted an emergency survey at that time, giving us information to set the foundation for the advance of local services. This meeting was followed by continuous travels throughout the micro-region. Members of the GYEP team of experts, albeit not always the same ones, established direct contacts with the mayors, registrars, and professionals working in local institutions of every single settlement and to an extent with members of local governments, religious communities and civilians. It was mostly after this initial stage that we started to work out the sub-programs for the development of the different areas and villages.

Preparations for **extending the micro-regional program** were similar although the possibility of a bid for grant money triggered a number of formal components (participation in association meetings and the like) (See Box 15)

Box 15

“I first established contacts with the **chief of the Multipurpose Micro-regional Association’s work organization** to whom I gave a brief review of the program and asked for an invitation to the association meeting. At the **association meeting** the mayors learned about the program/measures needed to shape strategy, the regional levels of the work (settlement consultations, micro-regional work group, strategic planning group) and the actors it would be desirable to include (from decision-makers down to families) and they decided on participation in the micro-regional program. After this **we visited the mayors** and in face-to-face talks had the chance to discuss the program in greater depth and detail, and to cover the questions that arose. We learned about the situations in each settlement and made joint plans for the next steps. In every case we asked to mayor to name a liaison. We discussed and came to agreement on the circle of people it was desirable to include in the program and on the people to be invited to a settlement-level inter-professional forum. We held **inter-professional forums in every single settlement**. We left the frequency of settlement consultations to the capacities of settlement residents. At the end of each forum we again thought over who we could invite to the next forum to include in the planning.

I reviewed the program, they described their settlement and then we worked together on identifying the needs of their children and formulating proposals for their development based on those needs. In parallel with the forums, I also participated in **visits to institutions** and personally met with additional professionals whom I included in the program. I established contacts with local institutional leaders, local influential people and always looked for allies, for dedicated people. Forum participants also brought in people who expressed an interest. With help from local professionals we managed to reach **civilians, families and children and organized family visits and local programs within the framework of organized meetings**. Staffs of the social and child welfare services were a great deal of help in establishing contacts with their clients. We coordinated times to visit families or instead of going inside plastic chairs were brought outside in the segregated settlements where we sat down on the street and conversed with interested parents and had the children draw pictures. We reached families living on isolated farms using the minibus of the village caretaker, cars or even a fire engine. When mapping a settlement we went into the local store and bar, checked out the places where young people liked to meet, looked at the houses and yards, stopping to converse with local people at every chance we had."

(Action research journal of regional coordinator)

In other words, during the extension to the micro-regions contacts were established much the same as in the Szécsény Experiment but the initial significant difference was that regional teams had not yet evolved in the micro-regions newly connected to the project. So, sometimes it happened that a regional coordinator was alone at most of the initial meetings.⁵⁴ This probably influenced the reception of the person and mainly, it put the initially lone expert in a difficult position when it came to truly understand all aspects of a situation, and to handle emerging conflicts.

Conflicts, problems

Differences in attitude and conflicts of interest were part and parcel of the micro-regional work from the outset. Very often, vehemently declared agreement with the basic principles and basic values of the National Strategy has proved to be a cover-up for indifference, or for basically prejudiced and pro-exclusion attitudes on almost all levels. Problems of this nature were apparent with mayors, registrars, professionals, representatives of civil organizations, officials from religious orders and involved parents. (See Box 16)

⁵⁴ This significant difference occurred because of specifics related to GYEP operation and financing and the timing of EU grants, so that while the team of experts in the Szécsény Experiment, which had a rapport coming from months of working together, was able to start its work in a very unobtrusive way from a back bench, this condition could not be fully ensured when the micro-regional operations got underway.

Box 16**I. Target group**

The association chair never turned his attention to the program, which left its mark on association work and on the individual mayors, too. Apathy, hopelessness and disbelief were typical of the mayors and professionals. Professional or information-sharing communities did not come about, either within professions or among different professionals. A hierarchy of power dominates the settlements and there is an absence of local communities (settlement development, key persons).

II. The people implementing the program

The coordinator is lonely. Gets no personal assistance in the micro-region. Professionals are hard to involve in the work and many drop out. It is tough building partnerships.

(From the action research journal of a regional coordinator)

Thanks to the long learning process with the Szécsény project, conflict management in the micro-regional extension was somewhat more successful than it was in the Szécsény Experiment. A local program was not allowed to get underway in the micro-regions until a local partner was found. Perhaps one of the greatest hardships in the Szécsény Experiment was caused by our inability to anchor all components of the program in the local community and our inability to resolve the contradiction between local interests and the more abstract goals of the program. We do not and did not think that administrative changes ordered from above or set as mandatory were the way to go. Conflicts generated in this way will ruin the entire program for they will trigger rejection of the new attitude and the real program goal will never be reached. It may have happened that the outlook we represented consistently after the initial period caused estrangement in a number of cases. We learned our lesson and awareness of this was deliberately included in the **micro-regional extension**. (See Textbox 17)

Box 17

"Another key consideration during coordination efforts and discussions was to understand one another in the most objective way possible. GYEP staff did not correct or lecture people making statements even if what they said was very inaccurate. GYEP staff did not oppose or qualify the often politically incorrect wordings, and in fact did not oppose or qualify racist statements. Instead, they explored the example raised as a problem from multiple angles citing other similar cases and their own experience with them. The unvoiced goal was to create uncertainty regarding these attitudes, forcing the person making the statement to think things over by providing an opportunity for him/her to re-think his/her attitude on his/her own.

Often the overwhelming feeling of being empty-handed – and a final line of defense – forced our discussion partners to try to turn the tables in an accusatory way: "Well, then you tell us what we need to do!" and to get from initial resistance to this point is half the battle.

One possible resolution – that comes up less often – is when experts offer a possible solution to a situation that appears irresolvable by describing what was successfully done elsewhere under similar circumstances. This will work when the coordinator knows of and has seen the settlement or institution cited, for this gives credibility to the experts and in an optimum case can stimulate the discussion partner into immediately exchanging experiences.

One other possible resolution to the situation is to jointly record the unresolved problem as a problem that others have clearly also had to face. For that reason, participants need to put their heads together and act jointly. In other words, uncertainty and hopelessness become transformed into a challenge." (From the action research journal of a regional coordinator)

During the course of the **Szécsény Experiment** much of what was initially a comparatively close relationship became even stronger in a significant number of areas while in others, sadly enough it weakened. The process began in the autumn of 2006 when barely two months after the first micro-regional meeting, it became possible to submit a funding application to the Norwegian Financing Mechanism for a complex program. Given the little time available to design the application, the principles and proposals of the National Strategy dominated the goals and the outlook of the bid although recognized local needs were taken into consideration. There was no time to achieve local identification with the program and it was impossible to do any joint planning for the project, though it was set to govern developments for a number of years. Later on, outside pressures generated almost permanently a situation in which moves were being forced upon us (funding generally evolved along the lines of financing limitations and constraints and not in line with the logic and

needs of the program). That is partly why the question of “whose program is this anyway” remained unclear and internal disputes came up time and again during the five years of the Szécsény Experiment.

Acquaintanceship with the local environment of the **regional extension** (the grant applicants, the content of the application, the financing, etc.) preceded the above problem and also raised another one. It was an open question to what extent could there be harmony with and correspondence to the basic principles and outlook of the National Strategy if local and constantly changing interests play a dominant and sometimes exclusive role in the planning, and primarily in the implementation process. (See Box 18)

Box 18

An absence of cooperation, a lack of a network linking professionals, a lack of information, and the frustration of local experts because of a lack of resources and adequate methods pretty well describes the x micro-region. The circle of problems surrounding the ability to conduct complex planning – in cooperation – is typical and can be found in LHH planning processes and other micro-regional projects. Ad hoc solutions dominate the process which is essentially plugging up gaps combined with a dearth of information. The decision-makers know nothing about community planning and they rely on tested models instead. Developments are in accordance with localized interests.

(Action research journal of a regional coordinator)

A long term outlook is the prerequisite to sustaining programs that combat child poverty and support integration. This means constant intervention and development. It also means using local resources in an effective manner that is coordinated with the program, which in many cases means that current operations and attitudes have to be changed to reflect the interests of the children. This is a long and difficult process requiring a variety of methods and instruments. Intensive services, the inclusion of outside experts, and significant investments in local human resources are equally necessary. This needs to be continued until the targeted groups become able to appropriately assert their own interests and local experts and the community become able to accept the need to meet the interests of weaker groups, even if they have to compromise and to advance necessary services on their own. Without this the evolving professionalism striving to implement the children’s program and other similar projects, and local child strategy plans still in their infancy, are at risk. Changes in local interests or even individual subsistence-related fears or compelling situations can easily sweep them aside.

3. Service development

The planning of concrete micro-regional development was in accordance with the goals of the National Strategy and the areas of intervention appearing in it. As far as the **Szécsény Experiment** went, the team of experts was the guarantee of compliance. In the **micro-regional extensions** regional teams helped with the micro-regional planning process and later on with its implementation as well, but here the grant conditions basically determined mandatory developments and the concrete sphere of optional activities. These documents have been continuously re-shaped, expanded, and supplemented by concrete service descriptions appearing throughout the consecutive rounds of the application process. Experience with the **Szécsény Experiment** and the lessons of the micro-regional preparations already implemented as well as changing government ideas are all reflected in these modifications. Thus, the guidelines regulating the application framework have become increasingly "targeted" or restrictive. To an extent, this can guarantee the correspondence of micro-regional programs and the National Strategy. However, a different approach can bring out a less optimistic evaluation.

The most significant problem, already mentioned in this document, is being forced to "plan everything out in advance." The process of implementation is also a learning process. As services are operated it becomes possible to discover areas that have no services despite urgent needs. The grant frameworks providing the financing for the micro-regional programs do not make it possible to respond to these newly discovered needs. Interestingly enough, the constantly uncertain funding for the **Szécsény Experiment** offered greater albeit still insufficient freedom to adjust to changing and evolving expectations. One part of the reason may be the flexibility of the civil organizations.

When the first opportunities to apply for grants became known, we (the GYEP staff) thought that the application guidelines had listed only the minimum conditions for a genuinely complex program. It seems however that the completion of the mandatory components of the SROP 5.2.3. grant (regularly increased in subsequent grant offers) exhausts the entire amount of the grant money. Of course, the guidelines for a grant do not offer mere outlines and principles but specify the concrete services and measurable indicators that guarantee target implementation. Carefully selected mandatory activities are important and can be to some extent guarantees of satisfactory development. But when they become exclusive, they can come into conflict with local needs and a wide variety of local opportunities, and with the tough process of re-shaping attitudes. (See Textbox 19)

Box 19

The planning process begins with the inclusion of a newcomer and the learning phase, whether we realize it or not. There is no meeting at which one or another proposal for a solution is not made. The micro-region level settlement and inter-professional forums are a separate and distinct form of work. Given that both micro-regions have large numbers of settlements in them (27 in one and 46 in the other), we followed the micro-region breakdown evolved elsewhere and organized planning workgroups in the central locations of the micro-regions. Again, the large number of settlements led us to choose a form of making suggestions that eliminates the problem of our inability to be everywhere at once. For this reason, we set up an on-line planning board enabling anyone to make a proposal by filling out a form. The on-line form was so successful that after a while it became an expectation. In fact, it was stipulated that the only proposals we would discuss were those that had been submitted on-line.

In order to keep the planning process in hand, we decided on the following solution. We have focused all decisions on the mandatory components and the portions of them involving infrastructure. After distributing infrastructural funding the settlements or institutions involved with the investment were obligated to design an appropriate professional program if one had not already been prepared. After preliminary approval of the infrastructural and mandatory components it was possible to give a good estimate of how much of the funding applied for would be left over and planning on how to use that money could get underway.

(From the action research journal of a regional coordinator)

Each of the micro-regions involved was disadvantaged. However, they were quite different in their series of needs and the priorities they set in meeting them. One of the major difficulties was caused by the fact that there was very little time to prepare the application. When extending the project to the micro-regions GYEP found that at least a year-and-a-half of intensive work would have been needed before a development plan and related grant application could be designed.

The start of the **Szécsény Experiment** however showed us that a poor micro-region cannot wait. This is triggered by many factors. In part it is experiencing a growing and permanent gap between itself and the rest of the country. It has often been disappointed by local projects set to run for shorter or longer durations, the results of which were very temporary to put it mildly. Projects aimed at improving the lot of the most disadvantaged micro-regions are often hit-or-miss type experiments. Local society has become impatient after many failures, losses of confidence and after finding themselves repeatedly abandoned and left with an image of hopelessness as regards the future. They instantly want to see something of the promised program. Therefore, one condition for winning the trust of the locals is to exhibit 'objective' proof. This means that new services and projects

have to be introduced comparatively quickly. Local commitment will not stand for the long preparatory period, the lengthy grant application process, or the oft-delayed appearance of the funding.⁵⁵

After the very first months the **participants in the Szécsény Experiment** opened up a children's cottage and began to operate an IT point in one of the settlements. These were the micro-region's first tangible signs that a children's program was brewing. During the preparatory phases of the EU programs, efforts were also made to make comparatively simple developments attainable through local funds and a bit of creativity even before the grant was won. Summer day-camps, and events organized for children and their families all helped in gaining local acceptance for the program.

4. Staffing

The local projects offer numerous services which require staffing, and local staff is best. This is a major problem. In the most disadvantaged micro-regions it is often hard to find professionals and other potential staff members who have the qualifications and experience to do the given job. But, while it is hard to find them, it is not impossible, especially if the search process is extended over the administrative boundaries of the micro-region to neighbouring settlements.

The **Szécsény Experiment** had been underway for a time before it became obvious to locals and to us that the program itself was a significant labor market factor. At the time when nearly 50 people on our staff were involved in the project the **Szécsény Experiment** became one of the biggest employers in the micro-region, **with the finances of the Foundation behind it**. This was different during the **micro-regional extension**. Given the central role of the micro-regional association, the employment consideration was emphasized from the very outset. In many cases this was clearly one of the most significant local motivation factors for participation in the project. It was possible to employ 20-30 people full time for three years in micro-regions with very unfavorable labor markets and few job opportunities, so it was understandable that it became a central issue. What becomes a problem is when this consideration does not evolve in parallel with the professional goals of the project and instead leads to partially ignoring them.

The uncertainties in the financing of the **Szécsény Experiment** triggered quite a few unexpected situations. One of the most significant of these was that in 2007 and then in 2008 the project got funding only from the Labor Market Fund, a public agency. According to their regulation new staff members could join only if they had previously been registered as unemployed.

⁵⁵ The local projects organized by the Maltese Charities confirm this finding. "Since the paralysis of the community, the leadership, and the services providing the help, block community action in this (initial) phase ... we established services we were able to provide within the given framework to compensate for some of these shortcomings." Marozsán, Csilla (2012) *Ha nyolcat jelentek, az jó lesz?* [In Hungarian] (Will it be okay if I report that there were eight?) Civil report, 199 p

In the **extension to the micro-regions** the protracted period of time in which there was no funding before the grant money became available was a special problem. There were a series of initiatives (in LHH micro-regions) that lacked funding and where funding often could not even be advanced even though implementation could have been begun immediately after the grant application was accepted. The people here are short on trust. They do not dare to cover costs for something until the promised funds are in their accounts. It is hard to recruit staff under conditions when the actual date that work can be started is somewhere in the uncertain future. (See Box 20)

Box 20

"While we have some idea of who the specialist coordinators will be, we cannot consider the recruitment as finalized. No clear decision has been taken on whether the prospective coordinators helping to compile the application can count on sure work down the road. Starting in 2011 the public employment program was halted and the staffs of the local GYEP offices were dismissed. The delay in the SROP 5.2.3. grant process reduced motivation." "At this time the micro-regional network has a gigantic hole in it. Of the 3 staff members working initially, 2 are no longer available in 2011 because of changes in the public employment program. So, two of the three micro-regional GYEP offices are empty. One of our former colleagues only can participate as an unpaid volunteer (which clearly means cutting back on the tasks the person had been handling). The third of these colleagues has been reduced to part-time work and in principle should have to manage the workload that three people had done in assisting the experts and coordinator. Once again, the work needs to be reorganized and thought over anew!"

(From the action research journals of several regional coordinators)

5. Services

In its "heyday," (meaning after it became familiar with the locality and relationship systems and had reached a level of relative stability with funding that could be calculated for at least 10-12 months in advance) services were provided within the **Szécsény Experiment** in nearly every settlement while in several settlements more than one low threshold service became available to local residents (See Table 3)

Table 3.

Regular services and programs being offered to the settlements of the Szécsény Experiment (Autumn 2010)

Settlement	Children's Cottage	School Coordinator Network	Study Hall	Leisure Programs At the Schools	IT points, Tele-cottages	Community Center	Second Chance program	Monthly Inter-Professional Meetings
Endrefalva	x	x		x	x		x	x
Hollókő								
Ludányhalászi	x	x		x				x
Magyargéc	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Nagylóc	x	x	x	x	x			x
Nógrádmegyér					x			
Nógrádsípek					(x)			
Nógrádszakál	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Piliny		x			(x)			
Rimóc	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Szécsény	x	x		x	x			
Szécsényfelfalu		x			(x)			
Varsány	x	x		x	x		x	x

Services were improved in the settlements with the largest proportion of families in long-term deep poverty and where there was a significant Roma population and segregation (Endrefalva, Rimóc, Magyargéc, Nógrádszakál and Nagylóc). Cooperation by the local government was the determining factor in the establishment and operation of the services. That this cooperation was lacking in Nógrádmegyér can be seen from the fact that although local needs would have warranted the services, the only one offered was an IT point. Hollókő is in a special situation. It is a small settlement that is part of the World Heritage and is exceptionally affluent although its population is less than 400. The mayor of Nógrádmegyér decided that participation in the program was unnecessary for the village.

We were aware of two facts at the start of the program. One was that the norms in the state budget financing of local public services were too uniform. When determining centrally funded contribution to local services, the regulations take into account only the number of inhabitants and ignore the socio-economic situation of a given locality or the greater need derived from the disadvantaged situation. The overloading, the capacity shortage, and the quality problems of health care, education, and social services and the like are primarily caused by permanent underfunding. The other factor was that when designing and developing public services, the predominant consideration is economies of scale.

The experience of five years of work has shown that when starting up a project in a community suffering from deep poverty and segregation a "critical mass" of services is needed at least for a time. Without this concentration of helping efforts it is

impossible to break through the attitude of hopelessness that by now has become a permanent fixture. When resources are limited, the principle of gradual universalism needs to be used to provide a constant professional presence and the broadest possible range of services in the settlements where the situation is the worst.. While expensive, the return is most likely a multiple of the investment. In 2011 we realized that we needed to target the settlements in the worst situations through constantly present and accessible complex services as opposed to the initial practice when we provided services across the micro-region trying to reach all the settlements. We were no longer able to carry out the new plan as our comparatively stable funding was terminated.

While we did not conduct a cost analysis, it appeared that even considering inflationary impacts, our relatively “free” use of various non-grant funds was more efficient than was the funding earmarked for the SROP projects. The scope of the **Szécsény Experiment** programs significantly exceeded the three-year plans for the micro-regions’s SROP project. In the five years of its operation the Szécsény Program used up about HUF 550 million most of which went to pay local staff and people working as coordinators in local offices. The other relatively costly part of operations was establishing the services (investments including eight children’s cottages, three study halls, community centers, IT points and the like) Our maintenance and operational costs were the lowest budget items. The current three-year projects that get about 400 to 600 million seem to be less ambitious.

We do not intend to offer a professional or other summary of our experience with service development at this time. However, it is necessary to briefly review three services. We need to touch on the Sure Start Children’s Cottages because these services are the foundation for preventive interventions. We need to underline the study halls because the Szécsény Experiment ran them slightly differently from the usual way (and from the expectations set in applications for study hall funding). And we need to touch on the community centers and the concept and practice of the “settlement method” because one of the main lessons of the Szécsény Experiment was that in a community living in deep poverty a constant professional presence, can guarantee the complex support needed to make things moving.

6. The early years – the Sure Start program – Children’s Cottages

If the pattern of reproducing poverty is to be broken we need social, health care and pedagogical programs that support healthy development from the very earliest age onwards. That is the goal of the Sure Start Program. The children’s cottages operating within this framework offer an alternative to and assistance in preventing the disadvantages stemming from poverty from appearing and thus they heighten the chances of these children. The Sure Start Children’s Cottages offer services to children and parents alike. The services provide early abilities development for the

children and if necessary, offer special services related to early childhood development. They also provide help in learning parental competencies and offer help to parents in job-hunting. The early intervention involves a complex outlook with the emphasis on prevention. Abilities development simultaneously affects the child, the parent and the limited and broader environment. (Table 4)

Table 4

Number and percentage of children attending the children's cottages in age breakdown (H1, 2011)

Age	Number of children, capita	Ratio of children, %
0-6 months	6	2.8
7-12 months	12	5.5
13-18 months s	17	7.8
19-24 months	40	18.4
25-30 months	43	19.8
31-36 months	40	18.4
37-42 months	21	9.7
43-48 months	8	3.7
4-5 years	17	7.8
Over 5 years	13	6.0
Total	217	100.0

In the first five years of the **Szécsény Experiment** eight Sure Start Children's Cottages began operation in the micro-region. From this point of view the Szécsény micro-region is in a unique situation when compared to the other micro-regions. Children's Cottages began operations in 8 of 13 settlements and 7 are still operating, meaning that **nearly every child in the age group and nearly every parent can access the service**. This is unique in Hungary and as such it could serve as an excellent field for an impact study of the service. The problem now is that these Cottages – which are no longer part of the Szécsény Experiment but currently operate with funding coming from local governments⁵⁶– now lack a professional, methodologi-

⁵⁶ Each of these cottages was established and operated by SZGYEP, two for short periods and the rest for years on end. We were forced to transfer the cottages to the local governments because of the current financing construct. A separate EU project had supported the nationwide extension of the Sure Start Children's Cottages until 2011. The first children's cottage projects were concluded in 2012. Each Children's Cottage was financed for a three-year period by the grants, after which the beneficiaries of the cottages had to agree to keep them running for an additional year. We knew when announcing the grant possibility that there would be serious obstacles to this. So we began trying to find way of central financing as early as 2009. Finally, a decree was issued in August 2012. Maintenance of the Children's Cottages will be funded by the central budget until December 2012 even if the grant money arrives a bit late. The funds for the maintenance of this service appears also in the 2013 budget. The price of central funding is the overwhelming role of central regulations.

cal foundation to fall back on.⁵⁷ This also means that the local maintenance outlook (which may, for instance, make the attendance of the child or the continuous presence of parents mandatory) cannot be influenced professionally. Nevertheless, we think this part of the experiment was a success (Box 21)

Box 21

A total of 277 children (133 boys and 144 girls) from seven settlements took advantage of Children's Cottage services over the time frame in question, either with or without their parents, on a total of nearly 2,500 occasions (days). The largest number of children to access the services were from Szécsény (85), but there were 40 or more in Rimóc (43), Nógrádszakál (41), and Endrefalva (40) (Figure 1) In the latter settlement the number of children appearing regularly (at least 6 times a month) was highest (13 children), which was 62 percent of all the children visiting in an average month. The ratio was lowest in Szécsény (10 percent). The average number of children visiting per month was highest in Szécsény, however (31), followed by Endrefalva (21), Nógrádszakál (19) and Nagylóc and Rimóc (with 17 each). It was typical of all settlements that most children were accompanied by their parents; on monthly average 92 percent of the children in all settlements came with their parents.

(Detail from a 2011 summary of service data)

"...we started up a process which demonstrated, albeit not yet conclusively, that an interprofessional system can exist and we started up a new way of thinking that it would be difficult to do away with."⁵⁸

The big loss of the five micro-regions participating in micro-regional extension was that in the grant application process that involved them, the establishment and operation of the Children's Cottage were separated from the complex Chances for Children projects and set into a separate grant construct.⁵⁹ The change introduced following 2010 to unite the two constructs was a vital and professionally justified measure. Without the Sure Start program focused on early childhood, a defining component of the complex program, the prevention focus, is impaired and the effort to do away with the reproduction of poverty becomes severely restricted. The opposite is also true. We can offer as many Sure Start Children's Cottages as we want and still not get results if an unchanged service environment greets the children outside of the cottages. Early development loses its force unless social and child welfare benefits in preschool and school, and family, community and child care services are advanced in parallel.

⁵⁷ The SROP 5.2.1 priority program, providing the methodological backing for the micro-regional complex programs and for the Children's Cottages, covers only institutions operated by the SROP grants.

⁵⁸ Éva Szomor in Bass, László (Ed) Interrupted action research 2012

⁵⁹ Constructs SROP 5.2.3. and SROP 5.2.2

7. Study hall type programs

The Study Hall program began a decade ago as part of an effort to integrate public education. One basic principle of the program to combat child poverty is to adjust existing public education, social, child welfare and health care institutions to meet children's needs and to support their operation along these lines. In other words, the proposal is not to set up services running parallel to the current dysfunctional institutions but to promote the reshaping of existing institutions so that they become able to function appropriately. Knowing that this is a fundamental principle, we need to explain why we set up three Study Halls during the **Szécsény Experiment**. The reason lies in the difference between short and long-term logic as already discussed in this study.

School failures, the significant proportion of dropouts and various administrative events involving the schools (school mergers, the termination of the upper grades of primary school in a number of settlements, and concerns with day care and study facilities /difficulties in paying for them/, etc.) were all factors compelling us to give school children effective support in the here and now, to enable them to continue their educations and when possible to actually complete their schooling.

Our solutions were very much like conventional study facilities. However, our services were not limited to children in the upper grades. Children in lower grades as well as upper ones were accepted. Teaching children in lower grades how to study was particularly important in settlements where moving to the upper grades also meant changing schools. Older students or prospective students were brought into the Study Halls through the Second Chance program. This program was designed for adolescents and young adults who wanted to finish primary school and/or who needed the boost to keep them from dropping out of secondary school (See Table 5)

Table 5

Breakdown of children attending the Study Halls by age (H1 2011)

Age group	No. of children, capita	Proportion of children, %
7-9 year olds	5	5.0
10-12 year olds	25	25.3
13-14 year olds	45	45.5
15-18 year olds	21	21.2
Over 18	3	3.0
Total	99	100

Living with multiple disadvantages was not a prerequisite for study hall admission. No one did any preliminary investigation of the financial situations or ethnicity of the children or of the education level of their parents. Despite that, the majority of the children and adolescents attending the Study Halls would have met HHH criteria had it been imposed, and the majority were Roma.

From the outset, the Study Halls endeavoured to cooperate with the schools. Our program coordinators located in the schools helped a great deal, some of them as-

sisting in our school programs in the morning and supervising the Study Halls in the afternoon. A broad range of children also attended our summer programs (summer day camps and regular camps).

Few Study Hall programs were planned for the **micro-regional extension**. One reason was the limited amount of funding available for investments and infrastructure development while another was most likely the expectations of a separate tender for Study Hall grants. At the same time, networks of school coordinators and groups of social workers were formed in a number of places within the project framework.

8. Community center, settlements

The idea of settlement community centers had not come up when doing the general planning for the program, but was found to be necessary once we had gained local experience. At the time neither the profession nor the decision-makers had dealt with the possible role of this service in deep poverty programs. By now there are any number of documents and grants available citing the need for this service. However, interpretations are quite different.⁶⁰

In the **Szécsény Experiment** the community center using the classical settlement method of early social work was a tool and field for complex project implementation, including the complex service package that was continuously available and accessible as mentioned earlier. The center's significance lies in the fact that it establishes a community space open to all and provides access to services that the majority of the settlement residents would not be able to otherwise access. The community space is not exclusively for either segregated residents or for members of majority society. Instead, it belongs to all of local society, the local community. The "settlement" idea appealed very much to volunteers. In fact, some of the volunteers became indispensable in our work. A settlement community center that is operating well was found to be an excellent practice site for university social work and social policy students. Since we were operating a children's program, the community centers clearly offered targeted services for children and families with children, including parents as priority (but not exclusive) participants. (See Box 22)

⁶⁰ The palette includes all variations from a center providing purely health care services to ones offering the entire range of social and cultural services.

Box 22

One area in which complexity can be achieved is community social work. We put the components of this discipline to work primarily in the localities where SZGYEP already had multiple services running, trusting that complexity could offer more as a package than could the sum of individual services. The goal was to include service applicants, build their self-advocacy abilities and empower them. To do this we had low-threshold easily accessible spaces (community center and/or Study Hall or IT point), in most cases with the building having been provided by the local government. Generally, the settlements did not cover overhead costs even though all agreed with the idea of keeping the facilities open to the entire population. We always organized programs that meshed with the needs of the given locality (gatherings of families with children not only for leisure time programs but also to discuss joint programs, to interpret relevant central and local decrees or ordinances, to participate in varied children's programs, to jointly pick up trash from the street, to attend film clubs, etc.) which along with the other program components might be seen as budding community development. We hoped that they helped families in interest advocacy as far as accessing satisfactory services was concerned. We were able to set up a working group made up of SZGYEP staff from multiple areas in which everyone worked in his or her own area with capacities and knowledge connected at baseline, resulting in what really was a boom in complex services to assist targeted groups. Some of these plans proved successful but vacation time and illness always caused day-to-day problems and at certain times we had to reorganize the daily and weekly setup of the base roughly every month. (We lived through particularly hard times when accounting invoices and additional documents had to be submitted, which resulted in delays of several months in paying salaries and travel costs, and as a result we had to temporarily close down the base.) We also needed time to prevent substitutes from upsetting processes we had already begun, for instance, preventing the school coordinator or IT mentor from intervening in family assistance processes without having all the necessary information first. We had to learn how to operate in a multifunctional and interprofessional way. (From the notes of the SZGYEP expert)

Establishment of a community center is a mandatory component of the grant process in the **micro-regional extension**. The latest set of grant conditions also requires the given micro-region to establish a service operating together with a Sure Start Children's Cottage connected to a segregated settlement or portion of a settlement. We have little information on the operation of the cottages at this time since the projects have just gotten underway and the investments required a significant amount of time to complete.

The establishment and operation of the community center was one of the defining experiences of the **Szécsey Experiment**. We learned a great deal about cooperating with local residents, with administrative offices, institutions and with colleagues, as well as about settlement acceptance, achievements, prejudices, and conflicts. (See Box 23)

Box 23

“What was initially good cooperation with the local government got much more frigid with time, partly because of the conflicts already mentioned and partly because of disagreements on concept level. They found it hard to digest the idea of intensive attention being paid to residents of “B” Street, and objected to it on the grounds that there were plenty of other people in the settlement who were nearly as bad off as the people in the ghetto, and that the others also “were more decent.” This last quote clearly suggests that settlement solidarity had not changed to any significant extent during the program, But that is not quite true because now, as we approach the end of the Norwegian Financing Mechanism and see the doubts about a continuation, quite a number of people have voiced their disappointment to see the project end, if not regarding the entire spectrum of services, at least as far as some components were concerned. We had just started to become a part of the village scene and it really is a shame and a loss that cannot be expressed financially to halt the settlement level interventions despite the bumpy road with its highs and lows. Starting it up again will be much harder than starting from zero. Playing with people’s trust is unacceptable.” (From the notes of an SZGYEP expert)

9. Outcomes

In our view the five and a half year Szécsény Experiment was an unquestionable success. It proved that it is possible to run a project on settlement and micro-regional level. It taught us many things about implementation conditions and difficulties, and how to manage them. It provided tangible knowledge, much of which can be formalized and offered to others. Despite all the difficulties it was a positive experience for the majority of the involved parties. And it certainly opened up the world for very many children.

As we wrote in the beginning of this document, there was no continuous outside evaluation of the program. One tool we used for internal monitoring was a regular periodic survey involving a representative sample of families with children living in the micro-region. The following table illustrates the trend lines of changes in the Szécsény micro-region using the available indicators devised by to the National Strategy so as to be able to compare the local trends with nationwide data. Obviously, only a part of the positive or negative changes are directly related to the operation of the Szécsény Experiment. During this five-year period, children and their families living in the micro-region were affected by many other influences, too. (See Table 6)

Table 6Changes in available indicators between 2007 and 2012⁶¹

		Szécsény microregion	Nationwide
	deterioration (-) /improvement (+) between 2007 and 2012		
A. (Employment)	People in households with no earner	-	-
	Unemployment rate	+	-
	15-17 year olds not working, not in school	+	no data
B. (Financial situation)	Relative poverty rate (0-17 year olds)	+	-
	Poverty gap ⁶² (0-17 year olds)	+	+
C. (Deprivation)	No money for food	-	+
	No money for utilities	-	no data
D. (Housing situation)	No water	-	no data
	No toilet	+	+
	Overcrowded	+	-
E. (Abilities, education)	0-5 year olds in day care	+	-
	1-4. graders not in day care	+	+
	School dropouts (age 18-24)	+	+
	Has been left back (primary school)	+	no data

"The data offer some important lessons on the first five years of the program. One thing we learned – not surprisingly – was that the data showing poverty, deprivation and disadvantages were several orders of magnitude worse for the children in the Szécsény micro-region than for the country overall. The other important lesson was that the program can directly influence certain phenomena and can be deemed successful on the whole in those places where the situations of the children in a given micro-region are seen to have improved despite nationwide trends showing deterioration."⁶³

XXX

At the time this document was written, in the autumn of 2012, the Szécsény Experiment is offering a far more limited sphere of services than it originally did, but it is still running. The Szécsény Give Kids a Chance Program of the Hungarian Anti-Poverty Foundation is bouncing along on the rocky road of a civil organization. Thanks to smaller donations starting in May of 2011 (Justice Ministry, National Sports Health

⁶¹ Bass, in Interrupted action research 2012

⁶² Average gap between incomes of the poor and the poverty threshold

⁶³ Bass, in Interrupted action research 2012

Institute, secretariat of former Hungarian President Árpád Göncz) and several EU projects targeted towards development (youth development, volunteer activity) it has been trying to achieve continuity in some areas and to implement the principles of the National Strategy. As far as the extension of the experiment is concerned, the first group to implement the micro-regional projects (five micro-regions) is about one-third to one-half through the project time frame. The second group (six micro-regions) is just getting underway. Another five successful grantees are expected to begin implementation in January 2013. Another ten micro-regions have applied for support and are waiting to see if they will receive it.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Additional information, papers and documents on the projects and on the content of implementation are available at the following websites. Szécsény Chances for Children's program www.szecsény.gyerekesely.hu (and www.gyerekesely.hu, www.gyere.net); while the websites for the micro-regions included in the projects since 2010 are:

Baktalórántháza micro-region: <http://www.baktagyerekesely.hu/>;

Bátonyterenye Chances for Children's Program – "Expanding World" http://www.tagulovilag.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=9;

Heves micro-region: http://gyepheves.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=81

Kistelek: Chances for Children's Program: http://www.kistelek.hu/palyazat/tamop_523/index.php?page=01&action=01

Sáasd micro-region – Calling for Equal Opportunity: <http://www.eselyteremtes.hu/>

SUMMARY

- **The program can be implemented on local level** but for it to take root and for the first potentially lasting improvements to come about a continuous 4-5 year-long effort is required.
- The financing of local programs is necessary but not sufficient. Without well qualified and committed participants, it will be impossible to carry the program through in the desired direction. Teachers, social service professionals, pediatric home visitors and the like are the most important actors in program implementation.
- The toughest task is to change attitudes – within that, racism and anti-poverty attitudes – and to manage the conflicts, many of which stem from this issue.
- Local worlds are fraught with tension and conflict regarding distribution of resources and positions, conflicts of interest between local groups, the contradictory objectives of external and internal forces, etc. One of the hardest jobs is to manage the conflicts of interest at local level.
- Financing the program with projects of limited duration (of 2 to 3 years) leads to difficulties it is well nigh impossible to overcome.
- There is tension regarding the comprehensive nature and complexity of the program and the specific goals of most grant projects even though:
- Children will only be receptive to learning if their fundamental needs are met – in other words, if they are not hungry, are not cold, and are not being threatened
- Local implementation of the program is just as important as national measures to combat poverty. Verbal support by governments cannot substitute for political will.
- The national political climate can influence program progress. In our case, the shift from a liberal, often neoliberal government to a conservative, often neoconservative administration has made it most difficult to implement the program.
- The relationship between the local government and the program is not necessarily defined by the political shade of the local government. The views of mayors and local leaders regarding child poverty are independent of their party affiliations.
- The professional prestige of the institution supporting and backing the program (professional, methodological, training), and its distance from direct decision-making is decisive in building local relationships based on trust.
- The lack of stability in a support system will hinder the programs and put effective implementation at risk.
- The absence of agreement between sectoral politics and the strategy to combat child poverty can doom local efforts. Unless professional policies agree on objectives and principles it will be impossible to reduce inequality, poverty and exclusion with local projects.