

## **Kocsis, Mihály - Koltai, Zsuzsa - Reisz, Terézia: Best Practices and Challenges of the Cultural Institutions in Baranya County Villages**



### **Research methods**

In the framework of the research in addition to the review of the Hungarian language literature on the role of public cultural institutions / community venues, English and German language online literature on the aspects of good practices of cultural /community organizers was reviewed. In October 2019 a focus group discussion was held at the Institute of Human Development and Cultural Studies of the University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, in which 10 practitioners from the field of cultural and community organization in Baranya County villages took part, in addition to the members of the research group. The following topics were revealed in the focus group discussion: a.) Organizational framework of culture in the villages of Baranya County; b.) Characteristics of the maintainers of cultural activities in the villages of Baranya County and features of the human resources involved in the activities c.) An overview of the cultural and community programs of the villages in Baranya County, as well as the exploration of the difficulties related to the organization and implementation of programs d.) An overview of the professional network of professionals who are involved in cultural activities and community organization f.) Exploring problems and difficulties related to local cultural activities; g.) Requesting suggestions regarding the good practices of cultural and community organization in the villages of Baranya County.

Based on literature examination and the experiences of the focus group discussion, an outline was developed for interviewing the leaders of cultural institutions / community venues in Baranya County villages. In November 2019 four pilot interviews were conducted in the following settlements: Abaliget, Véménd. Zengővárkony, Bosta. In connection with the pilot interviews, the measuring tool was validated and tested. Between December 2019 and February 2020, the status of cultural and community organization of the sample's other 25 settlements was assessed with structured interviews. (For the series of structured interview questions, see Annexes#1.) The questions of the interview covered the forms of financial and human resource management that ensure the performance of daily tasks, as well as the problems encountered in connection with the operation of the community spaces. At the end of the interviews, 25 questions were answered by the interviewees on the basis of a five-point Likert scale, so in addition to the analysis of the

interviews, a comparative study based on standardized questions could be carried out on the operation of the cultural institutions of the villages. The questions focused on ten issues: 1. organizational and maintenance framework, cooperation; 2. conditions of the institution's operation; 3. peculiarities of material resources; 4. infrastructural conditions; 5. equipment supply and its quality; 6. services, programs – satisfaction of local people; 7. local professional communication; 8. professional networks; 9. comfort in the current job; 10. income expectations. The five-point Likert scale allowed the exploration of attitude-like opinions on the ten topics mentioned above.

In addition to recording the interviews the researchers requested the following documents from the interviewee: a.) The local program calendar from the last 3 years; b.) The local development plan; c.) The founding document of the cultural institution.

Based on the analysis of the literature and the experiences of the interviews, the members of the research group marked the public cultural and community organizing activities of 7 settlements as good practices. (Nagypall, Hosszúhetény, Nagynyárád, Mecseknádasd, Boda, Hirics, Drávaszabolcs). During April-May 2020 members of the research group conducted structured interviews with the experts of the settlements implementing good practices. (For the series of questions from the structured interview see Annex#2)

In order to analyze the findings of the interviews on good practice, case studies were prepared about the following topics: 1. Funding - fundraising and resource management; 2. Regional effects - networking in good practice; 3. Good practices based on different age groups; 4. The role of minority municipalities in the implementation of good practice; 5. The role of the personal and professional competencies of the cultural specialist in the implementation of the good practice.

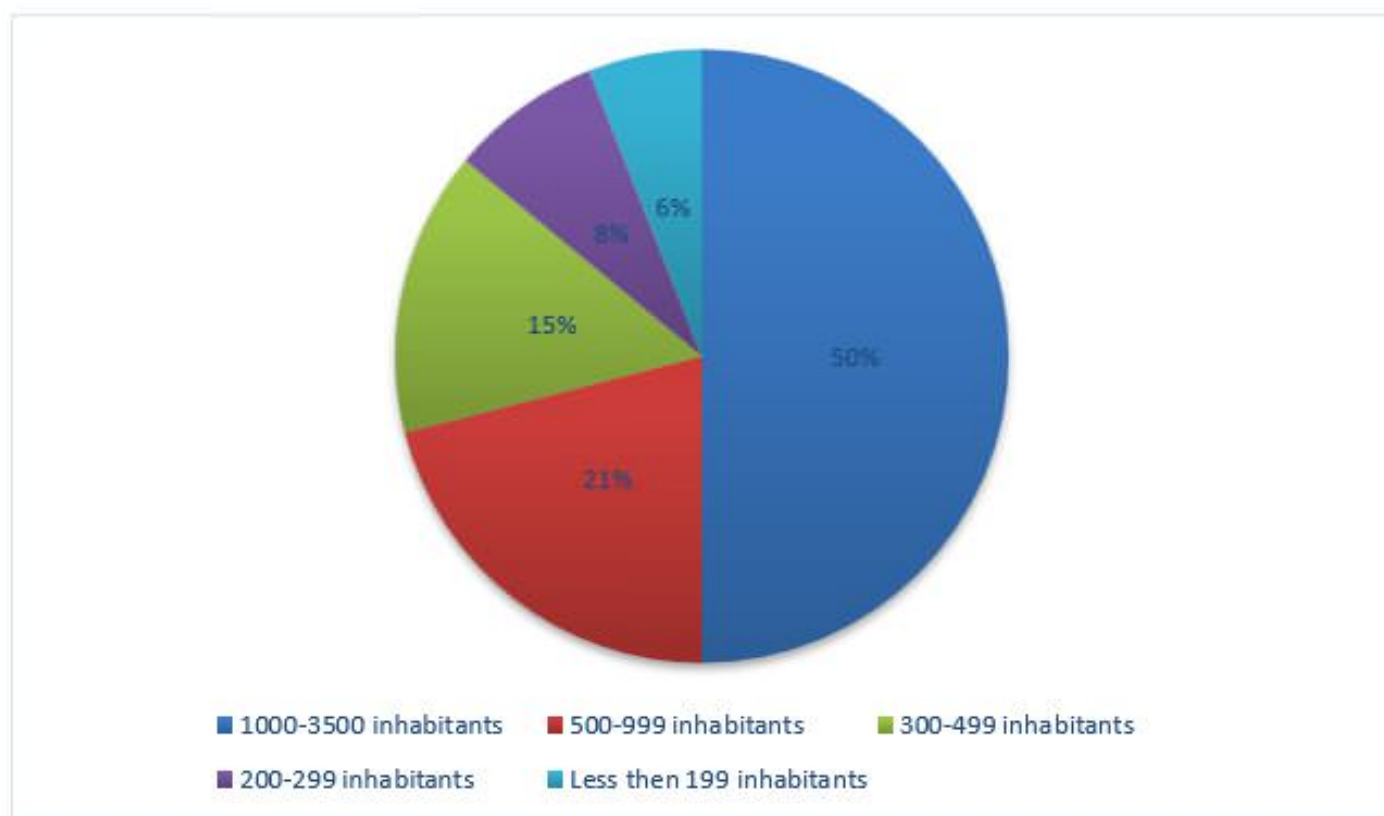
Based on the literature review, the analysis of the results of the structured interviews and the findings of the case studies present paper reveals the good practices and the most significant difficulties and challenges of cultural and community organization in Baranya County villages.

**The Sample** The sample was designed on the basis of a stratified sampling procedure in order to represent and take into account the different populations of the villages of Baranya County. Based on the stratified sampling procedure structured interviews were conducted in 29 settlements of Baranya County (for the sample see Annex#3) The total population of the sample approached 5% of the population of Baranya county (see Figure 1), 1.5% of them live in villages of less than 200 people (8 villages in the sample). Almost 70% of the sample is a village with population of 201-500. (12 settlements in the sample). Within the sample, the population of villages with 201-500 inhabitants approached 30%.

Figure 1: Distribution of the selected settlements by population (n:29)(Source: PTE BTK HFMI Research Team)



Figure 2: Population of the selected settlements according to the size of the settlements (n:17247)(Source: PTE BTK HFMI Research Team)



### ***Regional context of the research***

The population of Hungary has been steadily declining over the last four decades. (STADAT Népszámítás, [http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat\\_eves/i\\_wnt001a.html](http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_wnt001a.html)) This trend was also observed in the counties, although to varying degrees. While the national data were mainly influenced by demographic processes, the differences between the counties were significantly influenced by the rates of emigration and immigration. Following the creation of the Hungarian regions, the above-mentioned territorial differences became even more perceptible and the chances of applying for EU funds have often become region-specific. In recent decades, negative demographic trends have also been observed in the case of the population of Southern Transdanubia, which have been significantly affected by the unfavorable settlement structure of the region. More than half of the settlements have less than 500 inhabitants in the area (Térport. Dél-Dunántúl. <http://www.terport.hu/regiok/magyarorszag-regioi/del-dunantuli-regio>) In the recent decades the greatest population loss has occurred in villages with less than 500 inhabitants and villages with less than 200 inhabitants. Following the political transition in 1989, especially as a consequence of the liquidation of state farms and farming cooperatives, the population of their inhabitants could often have decreased by a quarter, a third, a half, and sometimes even more. (Máté 2017:169) Villages with a population of less than 500 are particularly typical in Baranya County, where 70% of settlements belong to this category. (Térport. Dél-Dunántúl. <http://www.terport.hu/regiok/magyarorszag-regioi/del-dunantuli-regio>) The population decline which has been generated by the unfavorable settlement structure and demographic trends could

be strongly felt in Southern Transdanubia in the last decade and it had a particularly strong impact in Baranya County. (See Table 1)

*Table 1. Changes in the population between 2008 and 2018 in Hungary,  
in four regions and counties of the regions.*

(Source: Herczeg, 2018, <http://www.megakom.hu/?p=3460&lang=hu>)

Country/County/ Region	Population (in 2008)	Population (in 2018)	Alteration (people)	Alteration (%)
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>10.045.401</b>	<b>9.771.000</b>	<b>-274.401</b>	<b>-2.73%</b>
Hajdú-Bihar	543.802	532.399	-11.403	-2.1%
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	399.200	373.631	-25.569	-6.4%
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	571.018	562.018	-8990	-1.6%
<b>Northern Great Plain</b>	<b>1.514.020</b>	<b>1.468.088</b>	<b>-45.932</b>	<b>-3.0%</b>
Baranya	396.633	363.000	-33.633	-8.5%
Somogy	325.024	304.000	-21.024	-6.5%
Tolna	238.431	219.000	-19.431	-8.2%
<b>Southern Transdanubia</b>	<b>960.088</b>	<b>886.000</b>	<b>-74.088</b>	<b>-7.7%</b>
Budapest	1.702.297	1.750.000	+47.703	+2.8%
Pest	1.195.020	1.261.000	+65.980	+5.5%
<b>Central Hungary</b>	<b>2.897.317</b>	<b>3.011.000</b>	<b>+113.683</b>	<b>+3.9%</b>
Győr-Moson-Sopron	444.384	460.000	+15.616	+3.5%
Vas	261.877	253.000	-8.877	-3.4%

Zala	291.678	271.000	-20.678	-
<b>Western Transdanubia</b>	<b>997.939</b>	<b>984.000</b>	<b>-13.939</b>	<b>-</b>

The data in Table 1 show that the rate of population decline observed in Baranya County was more than three times higher than the rate of national change. This phenomenon also raises the issue of the so-called perforation, which term is applied by regional research experts when the limit of the critical mass that can still be organized is reached. When the settlements reach that level than we can talk about perforation. (Máté 2017: 165). This is the case particularly when peripheral settlements increasingly “move away” from their former centers for various reasons, such as transport organization, school amalgamation, depopulation, while these centers are also constantly losing their former resources. (Máté 2017:166). It cannot be considered a coincidence that the tendencies observed in the settlement structure of Southern Transdanubia provided the empirical basis for raising this concept. The characteristics and current data of the regions can be analyzed not only from the demographic point of view, but also on the basis of their economic achievements. The European Union permanently examines the processes taking place in a total of 276 regions and regularly reports on their effectiveness and the ratios of performance compared to the European average. In 2017 among the 20 regions with GDP per capita below 50% of the EU average four were in Hungary (North Great Plain, South Transdanubia, North Hungary and South Great Plain). (GDP per capita in 281 EU regions:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/9618249/1-26022019-AP-EN.pdf/f765d183-c3d2-4e2f-9256-cc6665909c80>) In Hungary only the Central Hungarian region reached the EU average - mainly due to the effects of Budapest. According to the summaries of 2018, the data of three Hungarian regions did not change, but the lag of the South Transdanubia region even increased. (Négy magyar régió az Európai Unió legszegényebbjai között.

<https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20180228/negy-magyar-regio-az-europai-unio-legszegenyebbjai-kozott-278161>) In recent years general satisfaction and the subjective well-being of the population has been examined increasingly. The data collection technique is relatively simple: respondents rate their satisfaction with their lives on a scale of 0 to 10. The results of studies reveal the limited satisfaction of the locals in South Transdanubia. (See Table 2.). Table 2: Rank of the regions according to the average values of life satisfaction (Source: Kiss 2018:281)

Region	Average value and ranking					
	2013		2015		2016	
<i>Southern Great Plain</i>	6,32	2.	6,32	3.	6,42	
<i>Central Transdanubia</i>	6,32	2.	6,49	1.	6,35	

<i>Western Transdanubia</i>	<i>6,38</i>	<i>1.</i>	<i>6,38</i>	<i>2.</i>	<i>6,21</i>	
<i>Northern Great Plain</i>	<i>6,13</i>	<i>4.</i>	<i>6,12</i>	<i>4.</i>	<i>6,19</i>	
<i>Central Hungary</i>	<i>6,10</i>	<i>5.</i>	<i>6,02</i>	<i>5.</i>	<i>6,05</i>	
<i>Northern Hungary</i>	<i>5,90</i>	<i>7.</i>	<i>5,79</i>	<i>6.</i>	<i>5,77</i>	
<i>Southern Transdanubia</i>	<i>6,03</i>	<i>6.</i>	<i>5,75</i>	<i>7.</i>	<i>5,67</i>	

The economic and cultural achievements, lifestyle, environmental and work culture of a region significantly depend on the qualifications, education, knowledge, competencies, learning ability, state of health, characteristics of social integration, emotional intelligence, so the human capital of the people living in the given area. (Klausz 2006.; T. Kiss 2012.; Katona – Kőrösi 2017.). While the listed factors fundamentally influence the potential quality of human capital, the currently available human capital determines the social, economic and cultural life of the area in the same way. There are relatively large differences in the supply of human capital in the different regions of Hungary. According to Péter Bence Hobot's 2017 research, human characteristics put the locals in the worst situation in four of Baranya's 10 districts. (Hobot 2017: <https://osszkep.hu/2017/11/terkepen-a-teruleti-toke-magyarorszagon/>). Reviewing the regional and county conditions, it is clear for the authors that they are examining the opportunities of community culture in areas that are disadvantaged socially, economically and culturally alike, especially in small settlements.

### **Human resources in cultural and community organization**

Structured interviews were conducted with individuals with some role in local cultural- community life in Baranya County villages. The current job of the respondents varied widely. New or former mayors, municipal representatives, municipal administrators, heads of public cultural institutions, librarians, entrusted cultural organizers and volunteers were among the responders. The personal conditions of community culture in the examined small settlements are limited. It happens that an unqualified employee performing cultural tasks does not feel the deficiencies of his / her preparedness, while the motivational capital also appears as volunteering or undertaking OKJ [1] studies in the hope of a possible appointment. It is also a common practice that the local government does not create a separate position for cultural duties, nor does it appoint a specialist for this role. In several places, the employee performing cultural tasks is also an employee of the local government who performs taxation, registration and financial tasks. (eg.: Véménd). It is also common that a public worker /part-time staff is entrusted with the charge of organizing culture. (eg: Drávacsehi, Kővágótöttös, Ózdfalu.)

In the last decade, it has become regular for rural institutes of culture to fund the salaries of their staff through tender projects. Typically, the settlements have access to human resource and its financial coverage in two ways. One of the solutions is to obtain a domestic source for financing the employment of employees. In 6 of the examined 29 villages public workers carried out cultural activities with such tender funding, mostly without professional qualifications. The other common way is to incorporate the community organizer's salary into an EU-funded project. Cultural organizers and community organizers tied to the tender source can only receive their salaries for the duration of the tender. Most projects run for a set period of time and new funding for their continuation is very rare, although locals would need community programs.

### Users of the cultural institutions

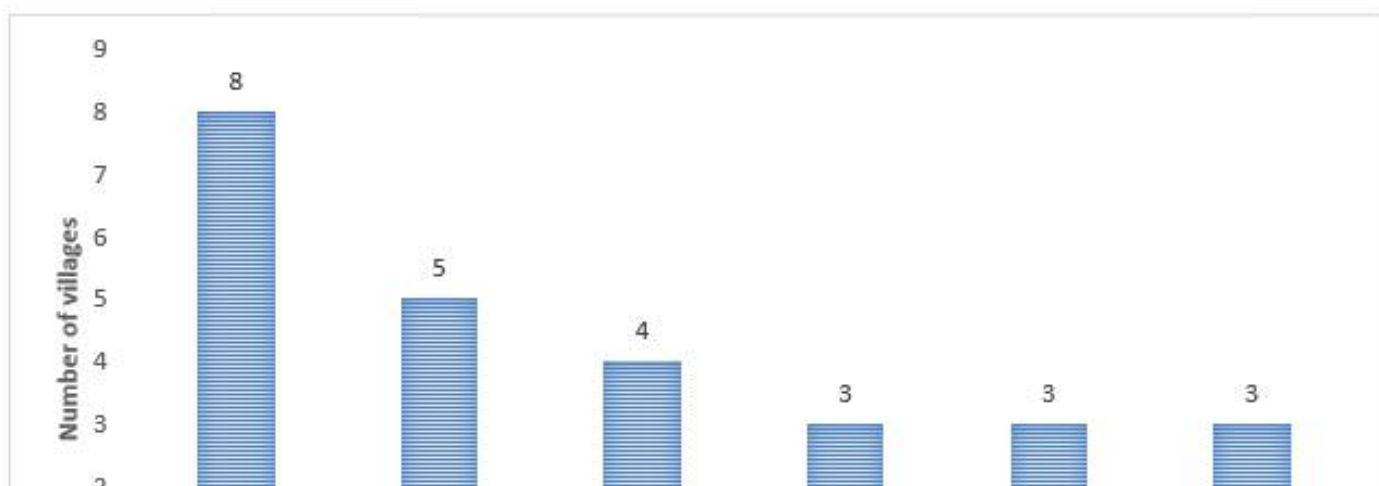
The studied settlements are usually characterized by continuous population loss but it should be mentioned that in some cases - some advantages, such as a good school, cheap land or port, moving in foreigners, CSOK [2] - there is an increase in the number of population. Not only demographic trends or natural population movements play a role in the decrease of the population in these settlements but sometimes state provisions also intervene roughly in these spontaneous processes. For example, in one of the small settlements 51 adults and 32 children moved out of the village so far as a result of CSOK. Moving out from the settlements for such reasons usually has a negative impact on the quality of the local human capital. Parents who change settlements for the sake of their children are usually the most educated. The relocation of young people not only contributes to the aging of small settlements, but also has a direct impact on the reduction of the economic capital in the area. This correspondence is not the subject of the current analysis, but it is worth mentioning that achieving the development of local cultural activities/ community organization is very difficult without the growth of economic capital.

### Challenges of the cultural institutions in Baranya county villages

The texts of the interviews were subjected to a secondary analysis, so we could get a more detailed picture about the problems of the organizers of the community life. By recoding the information, seven problem areas can be identified. (See Table 3).

Table 3: Frequency of the mentioned problems

(Source: PTE BTK HFMI Research Team)



Interviewees reported the following problems: problems with the day-to-day operation of the village and its institutions; lack of resources and management difficulties; lack of infrastructure /large hall / clubhouse; problems with cooperating with the controlling authority.; small communities; lack of opportunities for joint activities; disintegration of communities; lack of professionals and unresolved professional issues; various forms of poverty- deprivation; lack of job opportunities; poor transport and basic care; distance from urban areas; migration; lack of professional recognition. The latter problem was mentioned with the highest frequency. Difficulties of cooperation also often arise among the problems. Cooperation problems caused by communication difficulties and relationship deficits which lead to the disintegration of the community were identified alike. The lack of specialists is the next most common problem according to the frequency of the mentioned problems.

*„In large settlements a certain professionalism is expected, which is not the case in small settlements because there is no specialist. Here, the knowledge of the local society, the identification with the local identity is very important, because only an authentic and locally well-informed, locally accepted non-professional can act in self-organization of the locals with the cooperation of volunteers. It is also a problem that the enthusiastic volunteers working in these settlements have no connection with similar settlements, they do not know the good practices that could be followed. Though the NMI[3] county office convenes us regularly, I go there regularly, but only few and always the same people appear there.” (Mecseknádasd, 2020)*

With regard to the nature and frequency of the mentioned problems neither the size of the settlements nor the organizational type of the institution is decisive. The operational problems of the settlement, the infrastructural deficiencies and the lack of resources appeared in 3-3 cases among the most burning problems. These aspects were also examined in the context of the indices. Where serious problems arise, the material and infrastructural endowments and the attitude index about the operation of the settlement also reflect low and medium ratings. According to the aggregate indices of the cultural institutions 'operation, low and medium level institutional operation coincides with the variety of accumulating problems. Not only most of the problems, but all of the above mentioned problems appear in villages where low or medium level operation was recorded. The highest number of problems were reported by staff who were unskilled, had limited professional network and modest local social and regional affiliation. The problems cannot be solved due to their incompetence, professional isolation and the multitude of actual problems,

Those with a wider network of contacts seem to treat problems differently, however, this layer of staff also defined the lack of professional recognition as the major concern.

The decline of communities can be observed mainly in settlements with no educational institutions, library or a local specialist who would organize community life. The lack of professionals who could build and operate the internal network of the local society can also be diagnosed in the absence of communities and their rapid decline. The disappearance of the nodes of the local network also impoverishes the population by reducing their sense of internal cohesion. In summary, the different missing resources add up and these circumstances severely limit the functioning of small village communities in Baranya County.



## ***The role of competencies in implementing good practice***

Interviewees - from those villages which were recorded as scenes of good practice in the field of cultural organization by the researchers - mentioned the following expectations regarding the characteristics of the cultural organizer of a rural setting: credibility; knowledge of the settlement's traditions as well as the needs and work schedule of the population; ability to establish intensive and good relations with local residents and organizations. Several experts also emphasized the importance of establishing good relationship with the mayor. Several interviewees believed that in villages, as opposed to cities, certain personal competencies have more important role in the implementation of good practices in the field of cultural/community organization than professional competencies. Furthermore, the interviewees underlined that the cultural/ community professional should live locally.

Among the personal competencies the following were indicated by the interviewed professionals most frequently: networking and communication skills (6); ability to cooperate and work in team (3); organizational skills (3); reliability (3); credibility (3); social sensitivity (2). Additional personality traits were also mentioned: charismatic, humble, flexible, dedicated, patient, persistent, open.

The existence of the following professional competencies was considered the most important by the interviewees: knowledge of the settlement and its inhabitants (5); digital competencies (2); networking skills; ability to obtain resources; mediation- conflict management; professional qualification. Several respondents stressed that the local cultural /community organizer has to be accepted by the members of the community.

Excerpts from the interviews:

*„Credibility is the key. The person who organizes culture in the settlement must be credible to those with whom he wants to organize something and to those to whom he wants to organize something.” (Nagynyárád, 2020)*

*„Anyone who takes on this role and wants to implement good practice needs to know the village and the population. You need to know the locals, the potential audience / social group. If you go there unknown, it won't work. You should be there at home.” (Nagynyárád, 2020)*

*„A dedicated professional. Not even a specialist. But he should be dedicated.” (Hosszúhetény, 2020)*

*„In my opinion, in a small settlement acceptance is more important than the professional competence. The relationship is more personal.” (Hosszúhetény, 2020)*

*„Reliability is the most important competence. You need to be able to negotiate with the village leaders, but in order to reconcile the many different community opinions, you also need patience, knowledge and good networking skills.” (Nagypall, 2020)*

*„You need to know how to obtain resources, you need to be able to think in a system.” (Mecseknádasd, 2020)*

*„Here, knowledge about the local society and identification with the local identity is very important, because only an authentic and locally well-informed, locally accepted non-professional can act in self-organization with the cooperation of volunteers..” (Mecseknádasd, 2020)*

*„People’s needs have to be properly assessed and respected. You need to talk to them a lot, their opinion is important.” (Drávaszabolcs, 2020)*

*„You need to be able to measure what is needed, it requires good judgment. It doesn’t go alone, so you have to work in group and listen to everyone.” (Hirics, 2020)*

Summarizing the experiences of the interviews, it can be stated that taking into account local needs is an essential condition for the implementation of good practice.

*„Yes, I think it is good practice (our own practice), because it involves several generations.*

*There is a children’s camp for children, there are a lot of programs for seniors.....We offered programs for primary producers and we organized lectures related to winemaking. Furthermore, this is also true regarding our cultural groups. They present a wide range: dance group, choir, art association, performances, plays. Then there is the preservation of traditions in the village museum and the well-functioning indigo dyeing workshop which attracts thousands of tourists here. All this, in my opinion, generates that we implement good practice.” (Nagynyárád, 2020)*

## **Networking in good practice**

The critical point of the formation and survival of communities is the extent to which they can accept their activities with their members and the residents of the settlement. From this point of view the accepting attitude of the mayor and the municipal representative body also proves to be decisive in the life of a community. Social capital is very useful in building personal connections, accessing up-to-date information and laying the groundwork for operations. Social capital is mostly based on informal personal relationships, reciprocity, traditional coexistence. Associations familiar with professional community management strengthen their network of relationships through cooperation agreements.

*„It is fruitful if the mayor recognizes that a successful cultural event sheds a good light on him as well. In such a small villages there is no distinction between „they” and „us”. (Nagynyárád, 2020, május)*

Close regional-neighborhood relations and professional co-operations exist in those settlements where public education institutions operate, association activity is lively and internal relationships are strong. These villages organize events which involve locals and the inhabitants of the surrounding settlements as well.

*„It is important to have an organic connection with the school because this is the building of the settlement where many hundreds of people appear every day. Parents too. Luckily, the library is located here. (Hosszúhetény, 2020)*

Several forms and varied content of inter-municipal cooperation have developed in the settlements presenting good practices, based on their operational peculiarities. We can perceive them as organic community networks, whose cooperation dates back a long time, and they are connected by their linguistic, national and religious identity. They are characterized by neighborhood relationships and similar lifestyle. Geographical, professional, friendship and neighborhood proximity allows joint learning, so it is not uncommon that some programs are taken over by other municipalities. „Our camps are popular, we saw this from the people of Zengővárkony, we studied there, we do it regularly, but we also took the camp to the Hungarians in Ukraine for many years.” (Nagypall, 2020)

Another form of networking is emerging among social networking initiatives. Interconnections based not on neighborhood relations but on the work of regional organizations can be observed. Collaborating villages apply for joint financing. For the organization and implementation of occasional programs villages cooperate to win tenders together. This is how the villages with financial difficulties obtain the financial background for organizing the village day.

### **Good practices in funding**

There are settlements where the compensation of the lack of resources is tried to be solved by the intensification of local tourism (Hosszúhetény), or where, for this reason, the cultural organization is entrusted to a tourism specialist (Mecseknádasd). Grants which are coming from twinning village relationships are used for targeted events, renovation or creation of facilities. Sponsorship of sister settlements is more common among external supporters of settlements with minority municipalities. Obtaining foreign language stock of libraries, erecting public sculptures, publishing books, supporting dance groups /choirs, donating prizes for festivals and competitions as well as implementing exchange trips of associations are realised in this way in several settlements.

Funds from domestic or EU tenders requiring self-sufficiency are known only in larger settlements (Hosszúhetény), because the provision of self-financing and pre-financing of projects is only possible with larger reserves.

Fundraising requires skilled professionals. Well-informed cultural marketing professionals with good communication skills are needed to recognize the settlements' own values, operate networks and build a strategy for all of this. Those cultural organizers who presented good practices outlined plans and the possibilities of fundraising during the interviews. Municipalities, ethnic municipalities and (ethnic) non-governmental organizations mainly submit joint applications in the mostly Gypsy-populated villages of Ormánság and in the Swabian settlements of the county. Village days, ethnic events, seniors' days and festivals (eg. Nagynyárád) are financed in this way in the settlements which implemented good practice. Despite the economic difficulties that have plagued local societies for decades and the destruction of houses of culture, a wide range of community spaces have been created in the villages of Baranya and numerous individual and joint regional strategies have been developed for their operation. One explanation for this may be that the cultural communities of local societies have kept alive the traditions of decentralized cultural organizations of the traditional village, and that they have found fundraising strategies that ensure their survival in a modest but varied way.

## Summary

In the villages of Baranya County a process is taking place that points towards further disintegration of the eroding village structure. The negative economic and financial effects cannot be stopped only by involving social and cultural resources. The survival and revitalization of communities can create local social community relations and inter-municipal networks that can increase the resilience of the settlements in the region to negative processes. Regional determinants of resilience include stabilization of population movements, tolerance for ethnic, religious and other cultural differences and maintaining local basic services such as education, health, transport, postal services, news and IT networks. If fair livelihood is supported by the regional labor market and the local cultural institutions/ community platforms have appropriate infrastructure and equipment supply the settlements are able to preserve and develop the identity of the local society. Having a cultural specialist in the settlement who reflects to the needs of the self-organized non-governmental organizations and their members is also crucial from this point of view.

Local societies in Baranya County have increasingly rare but diverse communities. Strong cohesion within the local groups helps them to survive and operate a network within the settlement. If the village's development plan is based on local resources and strong relationship is created between local communities the settlement is able to appear in regional and wider networks and ensure relationships and financial conditions for its survival by enforcing interests and fundraising.

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[\[1\] Hungarian National Qualification Register](#)

[\[2\] Family Housing Allowance Program](#)

[\[3\] National Institute for Culture](#)

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