

Efforts Towards Roma Integration with Development Funds – Insight Into Professional Views

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- Interview with Ádám Kullmann

What are the most important development programmes for Roma integration in Eastern Europe in your view?

I do not think, we should define every word, but we must clarify the meaning of development programmes aimed at Roma inclusion. In my opinion, often those programmes that are not expressly “Roma programmes”, but reach a lot of Roma people, are the most important.

The importance of the not explicitly Roma programmes is illustrated by the regional programmes that I have the most insight into. In two countries, Hungary and Slovakia, larger programmes were started that could have effects on Roma integration. We have no information on any similar programmes neither in Bulgaria, nor in Romania, nor in the Czech Republic. In Slovakia they tried to achieve complex development in settlements or parts of settlements with a specifically Roma population. A significant amount of funds had been allocated to this, but the implementation failed: the designs of complex plans were completed, but by the time specific projects were planned and approved the allocated funds had been used up for other goals. In Hungary we can mention two attempts: the *Programme for Most Disadvantaged Micro-regions (LHH)* and the *Chances for Children Programme (Gyerekesély Program)* that have much in common. First of all - in contrast with the Slovakian programme - neither programme is a specifically “Roma programme”, but Roma integration is among the four or five main objectives of both programmes. This is because neither Hungarian programme targets settlements inhabited by Roma people, but tries the micro regional approach - at district level. However, the development of the most disadvantaged micro-regions is closely related to the development of the micro-regions as a whole - and that is why the regional aspect is important. There is no doubt that only a lesser part of the programmes’ funds are spent on Roma integration, but at least these programmes are being achieved. I think there were two main causes. First, the Hungarian programmes had no explicit enemies. Since the programmes were not specifically Roma there was no way to attack them for that. It is a sad thing that we must not speak of any programme with substantial funding as Roma, but that is the reality. When few years ago people were asked in a Gallup-poll what level of support different social groups should get for, and how much they should receive the answer was that pensioners and large families receive less support than they ought to, however, regarding Roma the response was the opposite. I think that in this respect it is important to say that the “Gyerekesély Program” is trying to reach the Roma through the children, and thus we can presume that they will not fall prey to complaints against the project as others have.

The other reason for the feasibility of the mentioned Hungarian programmes were that the LHH Programme and the Chances for Children Programme in part told to all regions how much funding they would have therefore, the micro-regions did not

compete with each other, but the allocated funds had to be used. To the contrary, in Slovakia they said that not every region will receive money, but only those who submit the best application will get it and so competition became very important from then onward. When the LHH Programme began in the summer of 2008 it really did generate a lot of conflict but by saying how much money each region would receive the local politicians, members of parliament and others saw that they had the opportunity of greater resources than most micro-regions could count on before. In addition, this financial resource was relatively predictable and could be planned for in a single framework. Because of this representatives started to use their parliamentary powers and stop ministers or the prime minister in the corridor of the Parliament to ask them about the Programme. Therefore, we could create allies instead of enemies. Perhaps it is sad that I have to speak about *in what kind of political context it is possible to successfully implement such a programme*, but I think this is a decisive point. It is least at least as important as the fact that apart from the political realities, we develop something technically perfect. It is interesting that in Slovakia they are rethought things and now they are trying something again, but a little differently this time. They defined some basic improvements e.g. access to drinking water, access to kindergarten, or even partly regulatory things, for instance to settle ownership of houses and lands, and name those as a state responsibility – and they would like to deal with those at the beginning. In this way they also allocate financial resources on the basis of need and not through competition.

Were there any programmes in the past years directly aimed at Roma integration?

Before moving on to the specifically targeted Roma integration programmes, let me say that the previously mentioned programmes targeting disadvantaged regions and groups can have an impact on Roma integration when there are built-in guarantees that ensure that. For instance, the employment of equal opportunity experts was such a guarantee in the LHH Programme ranging from problem identification to the evaluation of plans and projects; recasting negatively assessed project designs or changing rejected project proposals to include elements from other [successful] project proposals in the plan. These guarantees played an important role in realising the Roma integration goal.

The Settlement Programmes in Hungary were regional programmes specifically aimed at Roma integration. There were three tenders that had very specific territorial aspects and targeted Roma integration. The first call was the ‘Complex Settlement Programme’ directly targeting Roma settlements but its main problem was that it did not contain elements for desegregation. The second tender announcement was for successful contenders of the ‘Complex Settlement Programme’ for infrastructure development largely through support for renovation within the settlements, but that could also be used for desegregation. The third programme was only realised in the South Transdanubian Region as a pilot programme. The emphasis elements of the last one was on to support the moving of families who had been prepared from segregated environments into integrated environments.

Earlier mentioned programmes were supported by EU. Do you know of any others

for Roma integration financed by other alternative funds?

Obviously, many more programmes ran and are running supported by the EU and other financial sources but I only have a meaningful insight into some of them. If we look specifically for programmes implemented by non-EU sources we can mention a programme supported by the Open Society Foundation (OSF) and implemented in eight settlements. I highlight this programme, because the experts (as the Maltese Charity Service in Monor and Veszprém, Tibor Derdák and János Orsós in Sajókaza, Kriszta Bódis in Ózd and Judit Berki in Bátorfyerenye) who worked in the eight municipalities collaborated and have learned a lot from each other. Professionals from very different backgrounds are involved, for example the Maltese Charity Service in social work and Tibor Derdák in education have more experience than the others. They did not have to plan every detail from the beginning, only the main goals and activities and the cooperation was such that projects could be implemented in each settlement if the experts who worked at different locations were convinced that the plan made sense. It was not the donor who tried to practice control, but the experts controlled each other and if professionals from different backgrounds agreed, the supporter did not feel that there was any reason to doubt that.

What was the area or forum where participants could control each other?

There was a Managing Board and its members visited each other every month at one of the supported settlements. In the first half of the day they visited the location and in the second half they discussed next steps and the ongoing work they had in the eight settlements. To give a specific example: the operation of the secondary school in Sajókaza raised social issues beyond education and Tibor Derdák wanted advice and experience from the Maltese Charity Service professionals. The professional discussion in Ózd helped to seek a balance between the needed developments in the settlement and to facilitate the moving of at least one or two families to an integrated environment.

From the side of the OSF my task was the follow-up and I experienced that the control of the professionals worked much better than the bureaucratic controls we used to have under EU funding. There have been substantive and constructive professional debates. One of these conversations is very memorable for me. It happened in one of the settlements that participants were rightly proud to report that thanks to the 'Tanoda' (Extracurricular activity project) a previously unimaginable thing had happened: no one had to repeat the school year. The debate also expressed appreciation of others, but also pointed out that in addition to avoided school year repetition it is important that more and more people are getting into secondary school and go on to get graduation. Mutual trust has developed between the cooperating professionals and these kinds of remarks were not criticism but could have been very useful advice. Of course, at that time this mechanism worked well, but to develop it everybody's effort was required to obtain more support for their own development plans. These professionals working in tension strength and without funds this kind of intense cooperation cannot be expected.

To what extent were EU recommendations or aspects of the Roma Integration Strategy addressed during the planning of different EU programmes?

Not at all. When the state explicitly provides resources for Roma integration, we have to make a compromise. The Southern Transdanubian pilot programme was the only where they did not compromise. With regard to the rest, one got the feeling that the tender issuer would like to do something for Roma integration but is afraid that this would be despite the views of the majority of society and makes compromises in the direction of real or perceived expectations of mainstream society. In this respect, the fear to support desegregation is typical.

This is very important, what you say, because it fundamentally defines the development direction of these programmes. In your view, in what areas are these developments actually effective? Education, employment, housing, healthcare?

All donors have different effective strengths, for example, OSF's is to support local civic projects and the state's is to strengthen the quality and availability of basic public services primarily in education and health. For instance, the visiting nurse network should not be the strongest in the Buda side of the capital (quite affluent districts), but in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County (which belongs to the most disadvantaged regions). Therefore, if the state channels EU funds to strengthen the quality and availability of the basic public services then I think there would be a good chance for it to be done well. Then there are employment and housing which have dropped out of this. Housing partly because it is very capital-intensive and it would cost very much indeed for those 100 thousand people who are living in the worst housing conditions in the country to be able to live in conditions that give good chances for their children to have a good school performance. On the other hand, living condition improvement rather seems to benefit only particular families, rather than for example, the development of education, which makes it easier for society to believe that it is in the interest of everyone. In my opinion, our society does not have enough solidarity to accept that resources ought to be allocated to improve housing conditions, not today and not tomorrow either. In fact, this depends on the state of society: it is good to see that the Iris programme in Spain allocated significant resources in the environs of Madrid to improve living conditions and Spanish society in spite of the crisis continues to accept that. They understand that it is indeed in the interest of the society to eliminate the ghettos, because in ghettos such things happen and it is a hotbed of things that are bad for society as a whole. They understand that everyone wins with this. This is good. So, one could argue in favour, but I think the East-European society including Hungarian society is not ready for this. In the meantime, it is very important to keep alive some examples of the belief that it is not necessary to wait until a conflict erupts, as it did in Miskolc. I think, most of the housing issues cannot be handled for the time being, but there is a need and we should work to have visible models, that there can be humane and good solutions for everyone.

With employment regarding EU-financed development it is a big dilemma

whether further training or infrastructure investment is worth more. There is little evidence showing what effect can be achieved with one euro support in an employment project with training or infrastructure investment. Meanwhile, employment is very important for integration. Before the crisis everyone stressed education. Since the crisis it is education and employment together, because income-generating opportunities should be given to families.

In your view, what mechanisms dominated the selection of the beneficiaries? How sustainable are the procedures?

This really varies. There are better and worse examples. For me the painful examples are the 'Tanoda' projects. Contrary to the Sure Start programme, where EU financing had been changed to normative after the first round, here the 'Tanoda' projects had to apply for EU rounds again and again. The problem is that the timing always slips and there are many period when the previous project has ended, but the next round has not yet started. OSF gave support to 25 well-functioning 'Tanoda' projects to bridge this kind of period so as not to have to lay off teachers and students. In the next call only half of the 25 'Tanoda' projects were supported, the others were left without resources, while many other new, not unproved 'Tanoda' projects won resources from an EU fund. I don't think that it was a conscious selection or that the supporter wanted to make it impossible for a particular 'Tanoda' project, rather it could be that the weight of the content criteria was too low in the selection process while the administrative requirements were too high. In any case, it is a very sad fact, that half of the best performing 'Tanoda' projects did not receive funds.

Such random results can be avoided by allocating on the basis of need rather than competition, as happened in the Chances for Children and in the LHH programmes. I think, this should be done in more places. If there is something tangible as a positive example in Hungary, this is it. In many countries they think that it can only happen through a grant application but if they could see concrete, referenced examples they can easily change.

What do you think about the sustainability of good results?

We should not expect a one-time development to bring sustainable results. The EU demands sustainability in respect of investment programmes, not for the educational, employment and social developments. How can the Sure Start programme be sustainable if the state does not budget additional funds anywhere? Obviously, not at all. But the EU does not demand it, only the Hungarian bureaucrats extend it when they meet this term and do not understand what it refers to. Thus the service in the Sure Start programme should be high quality to be able to help children. It is not the services that have to be sustainable but the positive effect which they can achieve with the small children. I believe that these developments - contrary to investments - do not generate money to operate the service but they decrease the necessity of social assistance and thereby they save money for the state. Sustainability is used as a counterargument against any social development and it is based on a misunderstanding.

Approaching from the beneficiaries' side: in your view, what kind of institutions, organisations have had easier access to these developments?

There are millions of people, companies, NGOs who want to win support from EU funds. The OSF Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma programme was the only one that put money in, in order to allow those to take it out who would not be eligible otherwise. This programme was necessary because if Roma Minority Self-Government and NGOs planned Roma integration targeted project they had very limited access to EU funds. As a results of the professional and financial support given to project preparation and implementation in the frame of the Programme the number of those Roma integration targeted projects implemented by Roma Minority Self-Government and NGOs increased. At the same time, I think, EU funds will always be limited to NGOs and the state should pay more to strengthen the quality and access of relevant public services.

However, I think it is a serious problem that in those public bodies where the amount of EU funding has increased by many billions of forints they have not necessarily taken the steps that would guarantee the efficient and effective use of the increased amount which would really be needed. It is about trivial things: for example, the establishment of a governing body or a supervisory board, the mandate of a major audit, and a managing authority with renowned experts and publishing regular comprehensive reports about implemented projects, etc. I think it is a good direction that the state appoints a state institution as responsible. There is a need to invest a lot of money into the education system and employment services, but guarantees should be created as well.

How important do you consider in these projects the participation of those kind of civil organisations that are aiming at influence and to have a say in public affairs on a civil basis?

It would be important, but I am not sure that for this necessarily EU funds should be used. In slightly more civilised societies this works spontaneously, but here, in the Southern-Eastern edge of Europe it does not work so well, in any country. Not just in Hungary, but in any country.

How do you see the results of these development projects, how do you evaluate them?

One is that obvious, is that society is rather being torn apart than working together while at the same time a lot of money was spent. It also has to be said that more money went to support the more competitive sectors and social groups, than for integration. Measuring in itself how much went on social inclusion, does not matter, I think, if at the same time we do not look at how much money has gone, for example, as enterprise development, or to improve the infrastructure of Budapest and the larger cities.

Much more financial support went on urban development, which improved the centres of the cities.

The previously mentioned South-Transdanubian Region Pécs project-package is a good example of when the people who managing the city have faith to do something to stop or liquidate the breakaway of marginalized society. I am confident that this project-package will prove to be successful indeed.

Overall, it is very difficult to speak of results, because you cannot speak of one indicator which is relevant to all of the developments. Some programmes and projects were successful beyond the expectations, others were definitely not, or they had a negative impact. Overall, I think that the large amounts of EU funding could not have a clear positive impact. They just did not hurt Hungary too much. Before the LHH programme was started (in 2008) in our country fewer resources went to the most disadvantaged micro-regions. The resources for the LHH Programme amounted to 1% of the total resources for the entire period 2007-2013 while the population of the LHH micro-regions is 10% of the total population. 1% could obviously not compensate the amount of funding 10% of the population would need. But this 1% was concretely targeted and generated a positive process. After a few years the original trend turned: finally, more funds were being allocated to LHH micro-regions than to the other regions. In other words, those micro-regions where the Roma proportion is higher had a little bit more resources than other regions. This was not enough to integrate the LHH micro-regions, but it did have an effect in this direction. For example, in Bulgaria the opposite is the case. The situation is not very drastic there either, but the micro-regions where the proportion of Roma is high get a little fewer resources than the other regions. In Slovakia the UNDP (United Nation Development Programme) reached similar conclusions.

How do you see the inclusion of Roma people? How should they be included into these developments?

Obviously, there is a lot less than there should be. In the first place, it would have been nice if substantive work had been achieved in the Monitoring Committee. Each Monitoring Committee had at least one member who was delegated by a Roma organisation. However, some of the members had seen little of the operation of development programmes and they could not effectively represent the goals of Roma integration. It happened many times that members who were delegated by women's organisations and they had seen equal opportunity in a broader range and considered it as a matter close to their hearts and they represented Roma integration more effectively than those members were sitting next to them who had been delegated by Roma organisations.

In fact you are saying that Roma participation is important, but just because someone who is Roma is there, that does not necessarily mean that they can properly represent their own interests.

Absolutely. Members were very much selected from the political field since only Roma organisations could delegate members. In comparison, in Bulgaria the most active Roma NGOs could delegate members into the Monitoring Committees. Thus, Roma members of the Monitoring Committees had the necessary overview, they spoke the language and they could effectively realise the purpose of Roma integration. They could manage to amend the content of substantive calls and to increase resources. In contrast to the fact that in Hungary the Roma members of the Monitoring Committees had voting rights, the Bulgarians at first only had observer rights.

However, not just the Monitoring Committee Members are important, but also the former equal opportunity experts, some of whom were Roma and some were not. In the effectiveness of the equal opportunity experts there were also big differences, not depending on who was Roma and who was not.

In your view, what were the main inhibitory factors preventing the achievement of more efficient results for these development projects?

When I worked at the National Development Agency with 400-500 people, and there were only four or five who had already been at a Roma settlement, and that was the number of people who at least had some impression of how these regions are left out from the development. I think this says a lot. It is not only about there being no intention to support Roma integration, but it is also about lacking the knowledge that could help to reach that intention and to allocate resources for that purpose. Obviously, it is not necessary for everyone who is responsible for development to be an expert on Roma integration, but more people have to have personal experiences. But for this you need to go and look at something and get to know some specific story. To be a bit more personal, I also grew up in the Buda side of the capital, in a middle-class environment, and I had fellows with similar backgrounds even in the primary school. People like me can more easily get into development policy institutions than those who grow up in a Roma settlement. I think this should change gradually. It was a good initiative which targeted the involvement of Roma people into public administration. I consider it important that we hired Romani employees in one of the Units of the National Development Agency, regardless of the previously mentioned initiative. But it did not go by itself. There was not one Roma applicant for years to job vacancies. Therefore, we had to look for a potential Roma candidates first and only then advertise the job. Finally, we managed it and he became a colleague the same as anyone else in the organisation.

What would you suggest in order to somewhat decrease the exclusion of Roma people?

I recently reviewed the operational programmes in Hungary, as to how relevant they are to Roma integration commitments. A good number have such commitments, which is quite substantial, but none of them is quite specific. For example there is a commitment to establish and develop 62,500 nursery and kindergarten places. But there is no specification which reveals that how many of them will be useful for middle-class mothers returning to work and how many of them will be useful for children who grow up in disadvantaged families. This specification could be based on regional aspect (with regard to the degree of development of the concerned municipalities or parts of settlements) or on a social aspect (with regard to the schooling and employment situation of the concerned parents). Unfortunately, there are no such specifications currently. And many more examples could be listed. Now, with the start of the implementation of the new operational programmes it would be important to highlight five or six particularly important planned measures and determine the time frame and the objectives to be achieved. Then there would be something that could be followed up and there would be a basis to evaluate what has been achieved.