

SUMMARY REPORT ON CITIZENS PARTICIPATION WEEK

THE HUNGARIAN CASE¹

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Since the beginning of the Citizens' Participation Week (CPW) initiative, in 2005, Hungary has increased significantly year by year the number of events and participants involved. Key elements for this success are presented in this report. It is true that actions and results develop themselves according to particularities in each country. Collecting the Hungarian highlights in this document, however, could be a reference that can be adapted for future actions in other countries.

A good starting point for this success in Hungary is that the organising of the CPW has been parallel to the development of a new **professional network**. This has enabled national funding from the Social Ministry, an income to pay some professionals to find, link, and train local community initiatives, as well as collecting a small budget to organise events and activities. Networking is a key point of the organising of the CPW, since it provides a solid framework.

Meetings are regularly held and aimed to involve network professionals and key organisations in the CPW planning process. The Summer University and the cooperation with the **Civil College**² are to be highlighted in this field. These meetings serve as energizers, where ideas on how to increase attention are brainstormed. Added to this, workshops and public meetings are arranged to make society stronger and to raise awareness of the importance of citizens' participation.

A reflection about citizens' participation in Hungary is achieved by a yearly **survey**, with questions on trust, personal impact on local environment and personal and real participation. This survey is given to local activists and they distribute them in their neighbourhood during the CPW. It is also used at different universities by lecturers involved in community development. Although this might not be a real representative sociological survey, it provides with an overall picture and enables to focus more on future action to be taken and on how to engage citizens. The survey and its framework are of great help

¹ Source: Interviews to Péter Giczey (Debrecen, 25th August 2010) and Máté Varga (Budapest, 26th August 2010)

² See: Civil College Foundation.

<http://www.kka.hu/weblapok.nsf/dd5cab6801f1723585256474005327c8/a14191b7c1a0e5efc1256a880066a944?OpenDocument>

for organizing the CPW. It is a simple activity that people can easily link with other items, like street actions, conferences, festivals etc.

Publicity and visibility are key point for success. A person is in charge of sending materials to media, both at local and national level. Since media is not usually very interested in civil issues, a strategy needs to be planned ahead in order to present the news in an attractive way for them. For example, in 2006, a big gate of participation was built in the centre of Budapest. This attracted media. Another example was a labyrinth that was built during CPW 2007, where citizens would try to find ways of participating, send messages to future politicians and write messages on the wall.

Demonstrations are also a good way of reaching media. In 2009, the opening event of the CPW was a demonstration, in front of the National Development Agency in Budapest, against the system of financing and supporting applications. This was outstanding from the viewpoint of media, also at national level. After this, meetings and discussions with the National Development Agency were held, and recommendations on how to deal with the application rules were handed to the agency and to the Government.

Another important point is to make information available. Some **web pages** have been created not only as information spaces, but also as spaces where people can plan, join, organise, and reflect on events. Some organisations have interesting activities that can be transformed into citizens' participation, and work is being done in this direction. Case studies are written and the information on them is available. Logos are available on this web page, also translated into Hungarian. Photos, reports, publications and media coverage are available on the web page, so **results** are **returned** to citizens.

Added to this, emphasis is put on advertisements and call publications for media and politicians, also on the Internet, where the call also appears in many web pages like civil portals, governmental pages and small organisations. Special attention is put on showing it as a decentralised issue, in order to raise more attention, as well as on choosing the right kind of language to reach as many citizens as possible.

During the development of the activities key representatives of local Governments, politicians, MPs, stakeholders of the for-profit and artists are involved. In 2009, for example, interviews with different **opinion leaders** and well-known professionals were released every day of the CPW. These

outstanding people with high reputation in the Hungarian society would talk about the importance of participation. Videos with the interviews were distributed to media and people all over the country, and they were shown on some local televisions³. Parallel to this, different exhibitions and press conferences took place around different social, environmental and civic issues. Activities and good practices are later systematized.

As a well-known organisation dealing with community development, the Hungarian Association for Community Development (HACD)⁴ has contacts with the government and with some ministries, mainly with the cultural and educational one. There is an effort to push ministries responsible for community development to include these elements more strictly in their strategies and budgets and EU programs. They were involved, through the Social Ministry, in the planning process of the civil strategies of the government. During 2010 CPW, HACD and the Federation announced policy documents and suggestions to develop community participation for the decision makers.

Also important is the creation of the Federation for the Development of Community Participation⁵, as a platform for doing policy work at an **institutional level**. A yearly study on participation, proposals on how to strengthen community participation at national level and interviews with politicians are carried out. Working on this institutional level is definitely more powerful.

As a conclusion, one could maintain that this synergy of professional background, visibility and continuous interaction with all stakeholders (citizens, politicians, media and even businesses), backed up by strong and committed associations working at national and institutional level is building up a network that is turning CPW in Hungary into an event that is growing year by year in magnitude, impact and, therefore, importance.

³http://www.kka.hu/Kozossegi_Adattar/DOKUMENT.Nsf/4be80dafo05edcb8852566f2000b4f9f/88d8b17187926285c125766f0041cd47?OpenDocument#Untitled%20Section

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<http://www.kka.hu/weblapok.nsf/dd5cab6801f1723585256474005327c8/9ce773b74dbe4803c1256b00005e88ec?OpenDocument>

⁵<http://www.polgarz.hu/>