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Ideas for Connecting Rural Communities

Herbály Katalin - David West: Javaslatok a vidéki közösségekkel való együttműködésre

Összefoglaló
A fejlett országok vidéki térségeiben élő emberek többnyire magányosak. Ez a jelenség független attól, hogy munkanélküliek, alulképzettek vagy van munkájuk és családjuk is. Mindez adódhat abból is, hogy a vidék kevesebb szórakozási-és kulturális lehetőséget kínál az ott élőknek. Ha viszont ezek az emberek lehetőséget kapnak a helyi közösségek munkájában való részvételre, akkor majd várhatóan hasznos tagjai lesznek mind a társadalomnak, mind pedig az egyháznak. A szerzők két országot képviselnek (az Amerikai Egyesült Államokat és Magyarországot). Nyilvánvaló, hogy az amerikai vidéki közösségek hatékonyabban működnek, mint a magyarok. Ha segítünk az embereknek megtalálni a nekik megfelelő közösségi feladatot, akkor ezáltal a későbbiekben fontosnak érzik majd magukat. A tanulmány néhány hasznos tanáccsal szolgál, illetve már megvalósult jó gyakorlatot tesz közzé, amelyek alkalmazását követően a jövőben eredményesebben dolgozhatnak a vidéki közösségek. A javaslatok a következők: minden közösségnek legyen saját logója vagy szlogenje (esetleg mindkettő), rendszeresen végezzenek kérdőíves felmérést a helyi lakosok körében, legyen egy helyi útikalauz, támogassák a helyi hagyományőrzést, mindenkinek legyen lehetősége a közösségi részvételre és a továbbtanulásra, valamint mutassák be a más térségekben alkalmazott „jó gyakorlatokat" is.
Kulcsszavak: közösségfejlesztés, együttműködés, vidékfejlesztés

ABSTRACT

People may feel alone, especially in the rural parts of modern countries. They may be unemployed or undereducated, or they can have a job and a family. One can find fewer entertainment or other cultural possibilities in a rural area. Connecting those who are disconnected can help them be better members of a community and of a church. The presenters represent two countries (USA and Hungary). It is evident that local USA communities have better internal connections than communities in Hungary. Helping people connect will help them feel important! Here is some useful advice and observations in order to improve the results of the rural communities: choose a logo or slogan (or both) for the community, survey local people, publish a local guidebook, promote local traditions, provide opportunities to participate and learn, provide „best practises".

Keywords: community development, cooperation, rural development

INTRODUCTION

People may feel alone, especially in the rural parts of modern countries. They may be unemployed or uneducated, or they can have a job and a family. Few entertainment or other cultural possibilities are found in rural areas.
Connecting those who are disconnected can help them be better members of their communities and churches. The authors represent two continents (North America and Europe) and two countries (United States of America and Hungary). Though Hungary is one of the member states of the European Union it is evident that local US communities have better internal connections than communities in Hungary. Helping people connect will help them feel important!
The study will focus on the best practices which

could be used in the future in the Hungarian rural regions with the participation of the institutions of higher education.

BACKGROUND

Analyzing the different fields of community development within the EU and in the US can help us choose the best way of connecting people.

Community development is a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Community wellbeing (e.g. economic, social, environmental and cultural) often evolves from this type of collective action being taken at a grassroots level. In most cases community development ranges from small initiatives within a small group to large initiatives that involve the broader community. (1)

The following quote from the Community Development and Rural Issues section of ''The Budapest Declaration - Building European civil society through community development'' , emphasizes the importance of this field especially in rural areas:

''11. Rural community development should be a specific and explicit priority within national and EU community development, social and economic programmes.

12. National governments and the EU will need further to activate and sustain voluntary and community action in rural areas. This should be based on a well-developed rural infrastructure; access to services for all based on need; and effective and appropriate training and support for rural community development.

13. At the EU level, it is necessary to establish a framework for rural community worker competence standards.

14. Recognising the specific challenges facing rural communities, EU and national policies should provide incentives to rural communities to mobilise their members and their resources to address local problems, strengthening their capacities to do so. As part of this process, the EU should encourage working partnerships

between communities and local authorities, and between communities themselves, and ensure that appropriategovernment and EU mechanisms are created to respond to local initiatives.''(2)

The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) launched as a Company Ltd by Guarantee and registered Charity in Scotland on the 1st July 2009. They work on the principles of the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) model of development. Here is an example from Berkshire County, where the principles of ABCD include:

- The simple truth that everyone has gifts (or strenghts).
- The belief that neighborhoods and communities are built by focusing on the strengths and capacities of the citizens and associations that call the community "home."
- A placebased approach focusing on the assets of an identified geographic area.
- The belief that the assets of a community's institutions can be identified and mobilized to build community not just deliver services.
- A range of approaches and tools, such as asset mapping, that can put these beliefs into practice.

The community meets on a quarterly basis to discuss the tools necessary to effectively implement the principles of ABCD in their work and life, so

- organizations learn to identify their assets and develop strategies to achieve greater impact by effectively engaging clients as co-producers of their community well-being and

- neighborhood residents learn how to engage their neighbors and effectively use their gifts and passions to get what their community needs. (3)

The following definition can be read on the website of the Scottish Community Development Centre: Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by

prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities.

Good community development is action that helps people to recognise and develop their ability and potential and organise themselves to respond to problems and needs which they share. It supports the establishment of strong communities that control and use assets to promote social justice and help improve the quality of community life. It also enables community and public agencies to work together to improve the quality of government. (4)

The Centre promotes best practice in community development using this model:
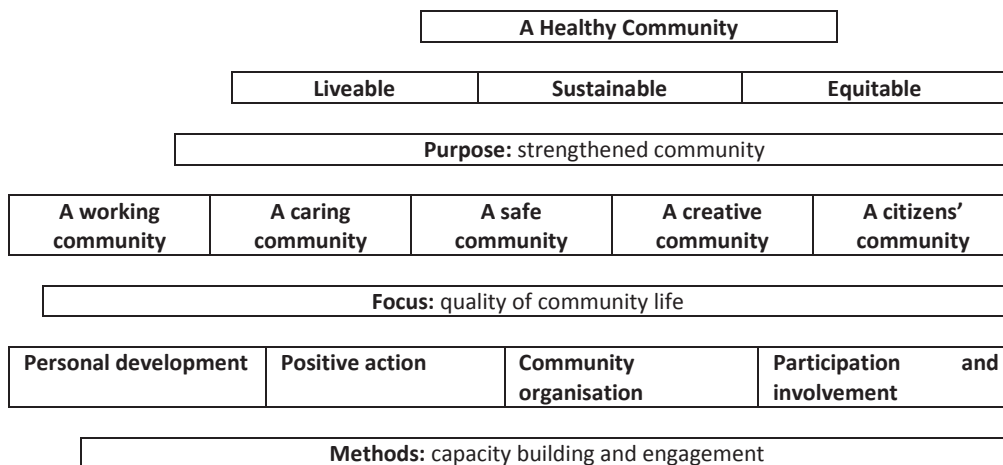
A Healthy Community		
Liveable	Sustainable	Equitable

Purpose: strengthened community				

A working community	A caring community	A safe community	A creative community	A citizens' community

Focus: quality of community life			

Personal development	Positive action	Community organisation	Participation and involvement

Methods: capacity building and engagement

Figure 1: The SCDC model

Resource: http://www.scdc.org.uk

The detailed version of the community development process can be used by other organizations, as well.

Purpose: People want to live in healthy communities, in which they:

- feel able to be who they are
- have positive prospects for their future
- experience respect and equal and fair treatment.

Focus: To achieve this people want to be in a community that:

- creates wealth and gives everyone access to its benefits
- cares for all its members, when they need it, throughout their life span
- provides an environment that is safe and attractive
- enables people to express and celebrate their creativity and diverse cultures
- enables everyone to participate in decisions that affect their lives

Methods: To support them to contribute to the creation of such a community, community development promotes:

- opportunity for people to learn and develop their own skills
- reaches out to and involves those who may be excluded or disadvantaged
- helps communities to create organisations that can tackle their needs and represent their interests
- works to promote engagement and dialogue between communities and agencies that affect their lives. (4)

The rural landscape and a reliance on natural resources present challenges in the United States of America, too. They see five primary opportunities for rural economies by the author:

- There are opportunities to create and deliver energy, through wind farms, biomass plants, and other alternative fuels.
- There are opportunities to provide "ecosystem services" such as carbon sequestration and watershed protection, in part through collaboration with environmental groups that increasingly see the value of working landscapes as a way to conserve and enhance the natural environment and habitat in rural America.
- There are growing efforts to link ecotourism with cultural heritage in a higher wage tourism strategy.
- The growing interest in local fresh food offers opportunities for a return to regional food systems that can bolster local regional economies, particularly when larger stores are buying local products.
- E-commerce and telework offer multiple business and development opportunities, from enabling laptop professionals to work from a rural home to provide services, creating new e-commerce businesses that can link to global markets, and even data centers. (5)

National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) is an organization in the US, dedicated to improving the visibility, coordination, professional status and resource base of community and economic development Extension programs and professionals.

They encourage us to share their website with our colleagues, become involved in one of their many activities, and give them our thoughts about how NACDEP can be useful to us and our colleagues. NACDEP makes no effort to proscribe what state or regional community resource and economic development programming and research look like, but rather is designed to assist those of us who deliver programming and do research under this broad umbrella to acquire and maintain the financial, political, technical and organizational resources we need to meet our objectives. (6)

DISTANCE RESEARCH/COMMUNICATION

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) operates as the primary outreach organization for the land-grant functions of Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities. The structure of their website refers to their main activities which are: About ACES, Resource Areas, Offices, Publications & Services, News, Weather, Calendar, Directory, Español and Jobs.

The structure of the website is simple and can be navigated easily without any special IT knowledge. The website is even available in Español. The Resource Areas in the table below lists activites and provides useful information that ACES uses to fulfil their mission of helping people and helping communities improve their quality of life and economic well-being.

Denomination of the resource areas	Activities
4-H&Youth	Alabama 4-H Alabama 4-H Center Alabama 4-H Foundation *Contribute to 4-H* PROSPER Partnerships Youth-Related Information
Agriculture	Aquaculture & Seafood Production Business Management Crop Production – Food, Fiber, Ornamentals & Turf Farm Safety Livestock & Poultry Precision Agriculture Insects, Diseases, Weeds, & Pests Climate & Weather Information
Economic Development	Business & Careers Community Engagement, Tourism & Assistance Resources & Publications Education & Training
Family & Health	Families & Children Finances Food Safety Health & Nutrition
Home & Garden	Home Environments Home Pests Home Sustainability Lawn & Garden
Natural Resources	Forestry Invasive Species Outdoor Recreation Water Resources Fish &Wildlife Conservation Wildlife_Damage Control
Urban	Urban Affairs & New Non-traditional Programs Metro News Programación en Español
Disasters	Agricultural Disasters Current Situation Families & Communities Hazards & Threats Human Health

Denomination of the resource areas	Activities
	Weather & Climate Information

Table 1: The resource areas of ACES in Calhoun County
(Click on selected activities for more information) - Resource: http://www.aces.edu/counties/Calhoun/

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for connecting and improving rural communities: :

- **Choose a logo or slogan (or both) for the community**
A possible logo can be the shape of the country or state orcounty with the official colors. You can design your own logo. Use the logo on local products. Choose a short, memorable phrase for your slogan.

- **Survey local people**
What do I see? What do I do? What do I remember? What do I imagine? You can compare the results on a local, state and /orcounty level.

- **Publish a local guidebook**
The guidebook should contain the most important information on the community.

- **Promote local traditions**
Each community must have its own traditions. If they are not known, collect them. Involve the local youth in this project so they will know these traditions.

- **Provide opportunities to participate and learn**
4-H, Master Gardener and Fall Fest are excellent examples of programs that can be replicated in other communities.

- **Provide "best practices"**
ACES can be an example for other countries to build a network and provide research based education.

To implement the above mentioned activities, a coordinator (e.g. a professional agency/group, a study farm of a college or of a university, a development center) would be needed in the given rural areas.

SUMMARY

The facts characterizing the Hungarian rural regions support the attempt to strengthen the cooperation of the higher education system (universities, colleges or their extension centers) and the different enterprises, organizations and institutions working in this field. In case of the institutions of higher education it would be important to establish or reorganize the "Study Farms" so that the future structure and activities would be similar to the main activites of ACES listed in the distance Research/Communication section above.

We can involve secondary school students (4-H&Youth) into our work. We can organize trainings (Agriculture and Economic Development, Home &Garden) on the subjects that we teach, e.g. Crop Production, Livestock Breeding, Farm Safety, Rural Tourism, Business Management and Environmental Management. We can carry out common research and the dissemination of the results together with rural communities and foundations (Natural Resources, Disasters). Students can also be involved into each of the above mentioned programs.

When planning the website of the center a simple structure like the one featured above should be followed because most of the potential users (e.g. farmers, skilled workers) will have only basic IT knowledge.

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