

“Those who create, create value. Who creates value also protects it....protects values created by others as well.” (Kriszta Bódis) Creation – as a means of social elevation advancement. In our projects, we organize social and integrational activities around creative work. The Global Block Award Winning video of the International Plural Plus Video Festival, the Valovi Rap film (http://cseppgyerek.blog.hu/2012/01/09/sikertortenetek_694) is one of the most successful programs of the creation-oriented social integration model programs

Where did it all start? Why exactly the Hétes-settlement? Who is involved? What are their ambitions?

What are their purposes...and their results?

Creation-oriented social and integrational project and model program at the Hétes-settlement of Ózd

Before the program started, people of Hétes – being outcasts of the society, ashamed of poverty – had thought that the settlement was their “final destination” (in that there was no way out from there).

Ózd is the second biggest city of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county. In 1998, an estimated 12.000 Roma people lived in the city of 40.000 inhabitants. In 2011, the population of the city decreased to 37.000 of which approximately one-third was of Roma origin.

In 1998, among the 16 segregations of Ózd – mostly inhabited by Roma people – the Hétes-settlement was in the worst state. The Metallurgical Factories of Ózd gave work for more than 100.000 people till the Change of Regime in 1989.

After the Hungarian political transformation, unemployment hit primarily Roma people. The one-day diversely populated working-colony split up and Romanies were segregated.

The state of the Hétes-settlement bears all the characteristics of the “ghettoisation” of Hungarian Roma settlements.

State of Hétes at the outset of our program:

Rundown tenement blocks lacking any kind of conveniences. Almost 400 people (out of which 250 children) living in 53 tiny studio (“room-and-kitchen”) flats; More families, more generations under one single roof. Accumulated & outstanding debts. Illegal and life-threatening use of electricity. No plumbing, two public fountains. Untransferred garbage. Unhealthy community latrines, parasite and rat invasion. The settlement is dark, lacks street lighting. The road leading to the settlement is impassable. Heating is primitive: furnace, potbellied stove, stolen wood, life-dangerous electric devices, uneducated, unemployed adults, mostly occasional and illegal errands, usury, high number of children dropped out of school, illiterateness, dawdling children, expected lifetime is more than 10 years less than among non-Roma Hungarian citizens.

Roots of the project:

Kriszta Bódis, leader of the Creation-oriented social and integrational model program: “I have been visiting the Hétes-settlement near Ózd for 12 years now; I know the problematic issues and every member of the community. While shooting, instead of keeping artistic distance, I chose the role of the active creator: that is, the combined role of a voluntary social worker and a civil right activist. With my films, which were made here, I helped to solve concrete problems between 1998 and 2006 as well by donating medicine, clothing and food in worth of a few million forints as by mobilizing civilians.”

People in Hétes could clarify their legal situations; the government helped them in settling their debts, while finally in 2000 the eviction and the bulldozing of the colony were stopped. The town council contributed to improving the circumstances of the settlement.

I also supported a family in moving out from Hétes.

From 2007 onwards, I have been organizing summer creative camps. These camps were the underlying bases of the model program that has also been extended with social work by now.

During the 5 summer camps organized so far, altogether more than 100 volunteers and mentoring Roma and non-Roma artists took part. In the camps, craft, media and film workshops, drama plays and other community- and self-developing occupations are held. Modelled on a settlement-type social work, we provide an on-site opportunity of artistic creativity and self-expression in the colony. Since in the settlement, many people starve, during the workshops we provide food for the families. Through their children, adults also got involved in the creation and in camp-life. With the lead of the volunteers we have been able to keep organizing workshops in Hétes regularly between the summer camps, too.

It soon became obvious that, on the long-run, we can build a social and integrational program on the community-forming effect of creative work. This is the creation-oriented method, as we understand it. With this method, we let outcast groups into the creator's position, and by this we help their social acceptance, elevation and advancement.

Start of Project:

Having won the support of Open Society Institute (OSI) in the two former years of 2010-2011 we reformed our creation-oriented method and started off a komplex social-integrational project. The original goal of this project was to attach excluded colonies back into mainstream society and to transform them into collectively supported settlements.

Strategic points:

Provision of both social care facilities and the basic necessities for life through as well a constant presence as through a requirement-based social work on-site; activity can range from acquiring official documents via counselling for conduct of life & everyday practices to family care Lodging: improving living conditions, rehabilitation of the living environment and renovation of apartments, development of communal spaces Education: holding creative workshops and those aimed at advancing skills, reducing absences from school, promoting farther studies Health care: granting access to healthcare services, improvement of hygienic conditions Employment: fostering labour market integration. Encouraging co-operations with bureaucratic institutions and offices (such as family support centres, guardian's offices, local councils, minority governments, schools, healthcare institutes) and taking them into the accomplishment of our goals Working out a sustainable model and methodology coupled with developing our organisational form

Results of our civil activity in the Creation-oriented social and integrational model program in 2011:

Van Helyed Foundation has been established and granted with an OSI (Open Society Institute) subsidy of 65 million Hungarian forints. This amount was turned to the settlement itself, thus forming a firm basis for the continuity of the program. (Throughout the 12-years project period nearly 30 million forints were raised as an extra fund. At least two times a year, we were sharing donations and doing volunteer work for 95 households.)

Through their constant contribution to the lead of everyday life at Hétes we have provided full-time employment for 3 social workers and a project manager.

While involving local residents, we did reconstruction works (for instance roof insulation, paving of pedestals with concrete, glazing) on and around all Hétes buildings (in 45 tenement flats plus 5 privately owned detached-houses). We finally managed to reach the tenant – that is, the local government – to balance out in part the rent arrears of Hétes people by crediting their accounts with our costs of works expended on each and every tenement flat. This construction of debt management may well point beyond this very project and can be applied in other cases as well.

Within our project there were forty families that seized to be in arrears and 7 that managed to reduce their amounts of late payments to an affordable level in the meantime.

Furthermore, settling the debts made it possible for Hétes people to become official tenants. Out of all Hétes families – in the majority living at the settlement with no legal claims (fixed abode or tenure status) at all – we succeeded in clarifying the legal situations in 10 cases. As for chance of eviction, in contrast with a total of 100% a few years earlier, it has lessened to 22%.

We dug out ditches to drain ground water and rainfall from the soil. Dwellers have been cleaning the ditches in public work.

The 25 most severely ruined rows of entrance steps were renovated part-time by locals. One of the houses was made more comfortable by re-plumbing (with this single step the quality of 15 lives was improved).

We also helped social mobility by moving a family of six out from the settlement.

Living environment was developed and communal spaces (soccer field, public parks and roads for example) were clearly marked by the voluntary help of locals.

The project, too, donated sowing seeds for establishing small kitchen gardens. 96% of Hétes residents took the opportunity and they managed to cultivate every single inch of their lands.

After 15 long years spent in complete darkness we introduced street lighting.

As a temporary solution in favour of an improvement in hygienic conditions we built a centre for public services (equipped with baths, restrooms, a laundry, a playroom, a social office).

On two occasions, we have had an overall pest control of cockroaches, insects and rats. We also cleaned out the latrines.

Hand in hand with the volunteers we organised full-range cleansing and disinfection actions all over the settlement.

We were equally successful in reducing school absences by 80% only by establishing a mutual signalling system with schools and Childcare.

In co-operation with public utilities (service providers) and the Town council we have started to implement card-operated electric meters.

Among others, we held two summer creative camps and several – often moving – displays.

In the Common (Creative) House, for improving personal skills and the community spirit we are following a similar social betterment scheme for the inhabitants of the surrounding segregations, too. The internationally awarded Hétes media section & filmmaking group works here as well. Cultural and creative activities involving nearly 100 Roma and non-Roma volunteers also occur here.

One of our most essential outcomes is sustainability. The program elements affecting lodging, social and communal issues are to be continued within the boundaries of a governmental initiative in 2012. This new program is scheduled to support the catching up of Roma settlements. In the full program all households are planned to obtain a card-operated electric meter and the rehabilitation of Hétes continues.

We are searching for further supplies, most prominently for the maintenance of the Common (Creative) House. Its renovation also seems to be urgent as it has a multi-functional role: in housing the creative – self-developing occupations with an ever-increasing number of people there; in giving home to intercultural events, to the youth, the mothers' and the married women's clubs; in operating as our day care family centre or as a film-making & media centre.