



Participation in social policy decision-making in Hungary

2010 and Beyond – The legacy we want
Getting Progress on an EU without poverty
and social exclusion?
Brussels, 29 May 2009

Civil society in Hungary – a historical background

- Vital civil society before the 2nd World War
- Civil society was prohibited during the soviet regime
- Some exceptions (trade unions and international NGOs)
- Resurrection of civil society at the end of '80s

Main features of civil society in Hungary at the beginning

- Establishment of legal background (main acts in 1989 and 1997)
- Activists were swallowed by the political groups (parties)
- Mushrooming of civil society organisations
- Broad financing possibilities for advocacy organisations (Phare, SOROS etc.)
- Set up of first umbrella organisations and networks

Main features of financing civil society in Hungary

- The total income of the sector was 3 300 million EUR in 2007
- Which is 95% increase compared with 2000
- 45% of the organisation had less than 2 000 EUR annually
- 41% of the total income came from the central or local state budgets
- Tendency of providing services (resulting more financial stability)
- 110 000 people employed in the sector

Some recent features

- The role of National Civil Fund
- The European Structural Fund
 - Negative: some organisations became bankrupt
 - Positive: some resources for the development of interest representing organisations

Participation of people experiencing poverty

- Lack of democratic culture
- Lack of civil activity and civic consciousness
- Very few and very weak self-organised groups/organisations of excluded people (with some exceptions)
- Lack of culture and practice of involvement people experiencing poverty

The other side: government and decision making

- Dominance of tripartit partnership
- But many fora for consultation with civil society (e.g. National Social Policy Council)
- Improvement as a result of joining the EU – partnership as a requirement
 - in the preparation of strategies and documents
 - in the use of EU development money
- Legal framework – act on publicity
- Very instable political situation

Civil society, participation and the economic crisis

- Some facts
 - Hungary is very seriously affected (GDP fall by 6% in 2009, growing unemployment, high state debt, IMF loan etc.)
 - Government actions to manage the crisis
 - Financial guarantee to banks
 - Support to entrepreneurs and companies
 - Cuts on social expenditures
- Almost total lack of consulting civil society

Effects of the crisis on NGOs

- Increased need for services and financial assistance
- Reduction of donations (mainly from companies)
- Even more closed decision making processes
- Economy and economic recovery dominate public debate
- Increased importance of local supporting networks and communities

Participation in social policy making – the experiences of EAPN Hungary

- Existing cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs
- Key factors of success in building cooperation:
 - Expert background – some well-known persons
 - Knowledge and regular reporting on the real situation
 - International background (EAPN)
 - Working with EU policies
 - Involvement of people experiencing poverty
 - Lack of other potential actors
 - Minister coming from civil society

- Key obstacles for participation:
 - Lack of capacity (mainly time) from our side
 - Difficulties with involving more people (esp. people experiencing poverty)
 - Lack of stable financing
 - Not transparent and accessible decision and policy making processes (timing, priorities, personal commitment)
 - Personal changes in the Social Ministry (and in the whole government)
 - The place of Social Ministry in the political arena

Some good or bad examples

- Inter-ministerial Committee Against Social Exclusion – responsible for NAPinc
 - Positive: involvement of NGOs (HAPN)
 - Negative: lack of continuous work, regular meetings; lack of involvement of broad civil society; bad timing
- Preparation for 2010
 - Positive: proactive network, open ministry, civil proposal for the National Program – with priorities, messages; NGO involvement in NIB; consultative body with people experiencing poverty
 - Negative: not yet 😊

- Direct dialogue with people experiencing poverty – National meetings of people experiencing poverty
 - Positive: annually since 2005, participation of the prime minister, announcement of an anti-poverty strategy; good involvement of people exp. poverty
 - Negative: difficulties in involving politicians, changing even weakening participation from decision makers
- Our own operation – working together
 - Positive: richer network, more authentic, organisational development
 - Negative: lack of methodological background, no answers to the expectations from people

Our demands for and after 2010

- Establishment of financing possibilities
- More commitment and openness from the government
- More publicity and transparency in policy making
- Introduction of Ex-ante and ex-post evaluation and monitoring (poverty-proofing) in policy making
- Set up a political function (minister or state secretary) responsible for the fight against poverty
- Actions and fora for direct dialogue (national and local meetings of people experiencing poverty)

Thank you for your attention!

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