

Case Study 2: OPE+ in LAG Podchlumí – Community Social Work

Abstract



The case study is focused on the *OPE+ project in the Podchlumí LAG*, specifically on its activity to support community (social) work, including the establishment, functioning and development of community centres. The aim of this activity is to connect communities in the area, especially the Roma and majority communities, to support the inclusion of socially disadvantaged people, to provide support for meaningful leisure time, to strengthen interpersonal relationships and, in particular, to activate community members. The supported activities aim to strengthen trust across communities and to gradually transform community life in excluded regions. The needs are based on a questionnaire survey of the local action group (LAG) and the implementation of the local action plan (LAP), where there is a need to support children and families with problems with social inclusion. The project has started a number of community activities (e.g. football for children, cleaning up the city) and has activated and empower the representatives of the minority group.

Case Study Subject

The project and its activities focus on solving problems related to isolation and social exclusion. The target groups lack meaningful activities in the territory, for example, they do not have space to meet and organize events. Part of the intervention activities is focused on supporting the Roma community, especially in the municipalities of Vysoké Veselí and Sběř. The aim of the activity was for socially vulnerable people to become active members of the community and to be able to participate in solving their problems and meeting their needs.

LAG Podchlumí and cooperation with actors in the area

The project is implemented by LAG Podchlumí without any other partner. Within the territory, the LAG cooperates with various actors, for example it has approached school representatives and other organisations operating in the area. Furthermore, the LAG communicates with representatives of municipalities, but It faces reluctance or lack of interest from the local leadership.

The target group of the project's key activity consists of **people of post-productive age and seniors, people with health or social disadvantages and the general public**. The community social work activity for the target group of people in post-productive age and seniors is focused on supporting the social life of seniors. Their needs are mapped and, on their basis, appropriate activities are then implemented. For people with health or social disadvantages and the public, activities are carried out, leading them to appropriate social services. Examples of community activities aimed at activating

target groups and the community are: **football training** and the **organization of a football tournament**, **Mother's Day** events, **crafts for mothers with children**, **music and dance clubs** and meetings of seniors. Other activities include **charity events** **selling trdelník**, **emotional maps**, **graffiti workshops** or a **draw of survey postcards** on which residents wrote their greatest wishes for the place where they live. The benefits for the target group are summarized in the diagram below.

		
Activation and increase of the competences and autonomy of the community through community work.	Meaningful leisure time for children (e.g. through football, dancing) and seniors (e.g. meetings and joint activities).	Increasing awareness of the availability of social services. In general, it also increases public awareness and involvement.



Example of good practice – using the community work method

The implementation team perceived the approach of **community development through the method of community work** as an innovative approach. People from the target group are often set up for a social services system that works on a providing approach. A change in this setting in the perception of the target group can lead to their activation and convergence with the majority community. An important part of the project is the strengthening of community ties through personal, permanent contact.

The project implementation team perceived as a positive result of the project the **involvement and activation of people directly from the community** for the selection of topics and the planning and implementation of activities. The project managed to activate one of the members of the minority community as a community leader, who gradually took the initiative over the ongoing events. Independently with his wife, he organizes football and dances for the children, participates in the planning of events across communities (e.g. cleaning the city). His motivation is not only to provide meaningful leisure activities for children, but also to connect the majority and minority communities.



"An example of a nice event is the city clean-up that we organized. The majority of us came there, the teacher from the school, there were about 40 of us, maybe more. We also organized a football tournament here, counting the spectators, there were about 300 people. I would say that we are slowly succeeding in connecting the bonds between people. It's going slowly, but it's possible. It requires patience. Our children are happy too, the boys play football, the girls go dancing, they are glad that we went for it, especially for our children here. I want to set a good example for them, and that's one of the reasons, so that they don't run away from home, so that they have an example that they should go to work, take care of their family, own a house. To set an example for such things and then do it themselves."

- Target group representative (community leader)



Co-funded by
the European Union



- ▶ **Bottom-up definition of needs/topics**, where topics and activities came from the target audience involved. The LAG communicated with them what specifically they would like to do to solve problems in the municipality and how they would like to get involved. **Linking it with local action planning** is an added value, because the needs of the territory are comprehensively approached on the basis of strategic planning.
- ▶ **Community dimension**, where LAG workers gradually enter local communities and support their activation and empowerment, but also through the implementation of community camps. **Development of social capital in the territory**, especially through community development. In this context, the project aimed to connect the majority and minority, increase mutual respect and address communication barriers.
- ▶ **Development of professional capacities for community work** in the area on the basis of LAG education in this field, which also supported local governance.
- ▶ **The implementation of community work** through the LAG project in **municipalities that are not inclined to this topic**, is a unique opportunity to implement a project of this type.

- **The OPE+ call was perceived as flexible**, and communication with the managing authority, if necessary, (including change procedures) was also perceived positively. Representatives of the implementation team also acknowledged **the simplified reporting**.
- x On the contrary, one of the main barriers to the implementation of activities was **the absence of suitable premises**. The LAG acquired premises within one of the municipalities, but it was later taken away. A partial solution was to carry out outdoor activities. Overall, a significant barrier was overcoming mistrust and unwillingness on the part of municipal leaders and other actors when working with the target group from socially excluded localities.
- x At the beginning of the project implementation, **perceptions and expectations regarding the concept of community work in the project** were harmonized. LAG workers participated in a course focused on community work methods. On the basis of the knowledge and skills gained from this course, the LAG workers then evaluated that they **could not achieve the goal in the whole LAG territory** using the method of community work, and therefore they set priority areas for the implementation of community activities. For a better understanding of the principles of community work, the representatives of the LAG acknowledged the openness of the managing authority, which organized thematic seminars on the topic of community work.