

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AS A POSSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPING THE MOST UNDERDEVELOPED MICRO-REGIONS OF HUNGARY¹

Bernadett Gálosi Kovács, Ph.D.¹, Norbert Pap Ph.D.², Zsuzsa M. Császár, Ph.D.³, Péter Reményi, Ph.D.⁴,
Krisztina Kőműves M.Sc.⁵, Andor Végh, Ph.D.⁶, Aliz Horváth, B.Sc.⁷

¹University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Political Geography, Development and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary, detty@gamma.ttk.pte.hu

²University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Political Geography, Development and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary, pnorbert@ttk.pte.hu

³University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Political Geography, Development and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary, cszsuzsa@gamma.ttk.pte.hu

⁴University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Political Geography, Development and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary, remko@gamma.ttk.pte.hu

⁵Ph.D. student University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Political Geography, Development and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary, komuvesk@gamma.ttk.pte.hu

⁶University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Political Geography, Development and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary, veghandor@freemail.hu

⁷M.Sc. student, University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Political Geography, Development and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary,

Abstract

Regional differences in development have further been increased in the last two decades. The most important question is developing the most underdeveloped regions. Due to planning and project generating work, the micro-regions have developed the project package within the centrally prescribed frameworks. The chosen areas for financing may have been influenced by political aspects as well. The most essential problems cannot be faced with the help of this method. We have conducted research regarding the improvement of the developmental work of the 8

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Transdanubian MD (Most Disadvantageous) micro-regions in order to summarise the experience of the development programme. By the experience of micro-regional planning, most problems occur in connection with unemployment and the related underqualification, and with the underlying drop-out from education.

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I. Introduction

Despite the oversized regional development institutions and multiplied development resources, regional differences in development have further been increased in the last two decades. Certain micro-regions have dropped behind the average in the highest degree concerning the indicators and liveability; in certain places the conditions suggest the level of Third World countries. These are the so-called most disadvantageous or MD micro-regions. Facing this problem, the Hungarian government and the regional development institution system has worked out an own development programme for the improvement of these regions. It is questionable whether the regional policy shaped after the European patterns is suitable for the solution of these problems.

One of the problems in regional development policy having been present for a long time – and presumably to remain for a long while – is developing the most underdeveloped regions. Unfortunately the difference between the developed and the underdeveloped has increased in Hungary during the last two decades – despite the strengthening regional politics. These regions are usually afflicted with multiple disadvantages, therefore it is not enough to explore and change only one cause leading to underdevelopment. It is of complex origin; the effect of several correlated factor-layers can be observed. It is an elemental thesis in case of local improvements that investing into human resources (to put it in an ordinary way, into people) and improving the conditions of the population (qualification, healthcare, standards of living, etc.) is one of the most efficient and less costly means to eliminate underdevelopment. Despite its cost-efficiency only long-term results can be expected; in many cases it takes generations to benefit from the investment. In this work we will review the conclusions and suggestions of the educational aspects of a complex Hungarian development programme.

The governmental flagship programme “No one will be left behind”

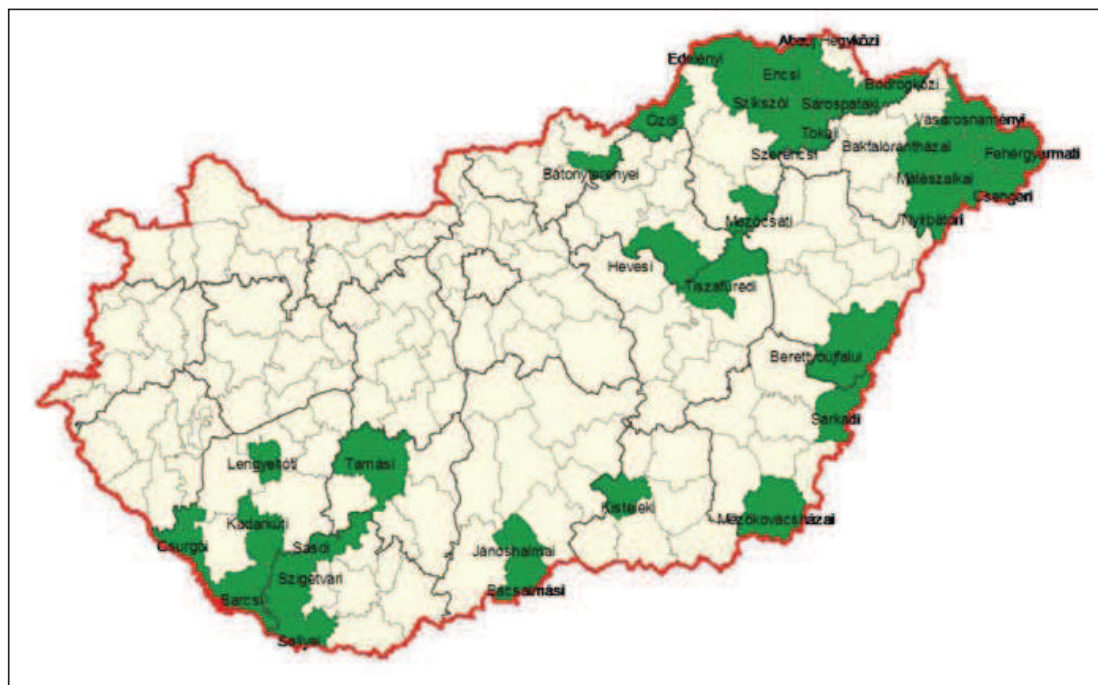
In the summer of 2007 the government selected 33 micro-regions which are the most underdeveloped and in which 10% of the population live, based on the classification according to the survey of the CSO and the complex indicator² created by the latter. 12 such micro-regions are located in Northern Hungary, 8 in Észak-Alföld (the North of the Great Plain), 5 in Dél-Alföld (the South of the Great Plain), and 8 in Dél-Dunántúl (Southern Transdanubia). Regarding the chosen micro-regions the “New Hungary Equalising Developmental Programme” was announced with the motto of “No one will be left behind”.

Due to planning and project generating work, the micro-regions have developed the project package within the centrally prescribed frameworks for the entire sum retained for the 33 micro-regions – respecting the population and the number of settlements. The chosen areas are characterised by a peculiar settlement structure (disintegrated, lacking towns), a generally high rate of unemployment, a low capability for the absorption of resources, deficient lineal and human infrastructure, and a high proportion of the Roma population. The choice for financing may have been influenced by political aspects as well.

The aim of the programming is on the one hand the initiation of sustainable development processes that, according to the expectations, may slow down or stop dropping off and may enhance standards of living, environment and services, thus the general welfare of the population, and therefore it may strengthen the capability of settlements to retain their population. Thus the programme is aimed at targeted human resource improvement, regional economic development, environmental and infrastructure development in the micro-regions.

² Statistical data used: income tax, rate of permanent employment-seekers, activity rate, number of functioning enterprises, number of school classrooms, number of completed school grades, number of persons with a secondary school leaving exam, number of recipients of social benefits, number of GP visits, rate of population per the number of General Practitioners, mortality rate, basic access, drinking water supply rate, sewage rate, waste collection rate.

Fig.1.: The most disadvantaged micro-regions in Hungary (MD)(Source: www.nfu.hu)



The basic principles of the flagship programme for subsidy were the following:

- resource-based development (advantage in accessing resources)
- only plans developed together with local participants can be successful
- it is not enough to develop infrastructure, it must be “filled up” with meaning
- no investments only for the sake of prestige!
- social integration of the Roma
- planning in accordance with local needs

These principles were realised in a rather contradictory way:

- resource-based development – resources were collected on the basis of the residual principle,
- only plans developed together with local participants can be successful – partnership is exclusively formal, marketing-viewed, actual local co-operation was not needed, indicators were only quantitative,
- it is not enough to develop infrastructure, it must be “filled up” with meaning – locals were not able to cope with this otherwise advised principle, they

did not need it, they attempted to satisfy it to a minimal degree, without any enthusiasm,

- no investments only for the sake of prestige! – the meaning of these “prestige-investments” was not defined,
- social integration of the Roma – the leaders of the Roma community participated in the programme only to a very small degree,
- planning in accordance with local needs – but there was not enough time nor any way to survey local needs, and the NFU (National Development Agency) has specified the directions of development.

Criticism of the programme

Those who dreamed up and realised the programme ignored several questions that could have an essential influence on the realisation and success of the programmes. The first of these questions is the geographical character of the area, that is, the fact that typically liminary regions are in question, the problems of which are strongly connected to the questions of an isolated vicinity. The other one is that the leaders of the programme at the national level did not comprehend the peculiar culture of the developmental target areas. This situation cannot be interpreted merely by quantitative, extrinsic indicators. The development method adapted from Western Europe (resource-based planning) had been developed for social conditions with a high level of qualification, a well-developed, characteristically middle-class society. However, the society of MD regions is not characterised by this. So even the most essential problems cannot be faced with the help of this method.

Spatial structural aspect

15 out of 33 MD micro-regions are directly on the border of the state, and only 6 are located in a distance more than 50 kms away from the borders. Thus, more than 80% of the area involved in the programme is in a liminary position. Therefore it would be a mistake to plan development ignoring international dimensions that span over the borders at the arrangement. Consequently, the main aspects to be assessed are the following:

- assessment of former and recent vicinity relations
- the question of depopulation
- conditions of traffic and transport

- relying on a strong relationship system extending over the borders

Based on the above typology, the following can be stated about MD regions: small-village, plain-type,

- typically rural,
- located on the inner and outer peripheries,
- characterised by centres with a low capacity of attraction,
- do not possess even the minimum resources for getting through,
- regional development target areas,
- which have a distinct ethnical character in several cases.

II. The outcome of our research

We have conducted research regarding the improvement of the developmental work of the 8 Transdanubian MD micro-region in order to summarise the experience of the development programme. These were characteristically empirical observations.

- Summarising the experience of planners (based on the opinions of cca.20 planners)
- Conducting a survey by questioning local partners (250-300 persons/50 respondents)
- Evaluation of the nature of the projects that had been accepted

We examined in the following sections:

- Method of planning
- Communication
- Principle of equal opportunities
- Has co-operation been achieved?
- Relationship with micro-regional centres – the question of village-town relationship
- Innovations
- Chances for recovery
- Evaluation of emerging programmes

Chart 2. sums up the most important results of the survey.

Chart 2.: Classification of problems in the order of the need of modification concerning the region

	Problem	Value
1.	Unemployment	363
2.	Lack of employers, new employment, enterprises with a strong balance sheet, industrial firms and industrial areas	252
3.	Underdeveloped, deficient infrastructure	194
4.	Unfavourable traffic options (deficient access, high rate of dead-end settlements, low level of public transport)	169
5.	Low level of qualification, high rate of unqualified work force	165
6.	Low, decreasing number of enterprises/will to venture, lack of capital, lack of investors, entrepreneurs lacking capital, weak enterprises	131
7.	Deep poverty, low income level, dropped-off classes and settlements	121
8.	Unfavourable demographic conditions (ageing, migration)	117
9.	Unfavourable educational conditions – lack of infrastructure and vocational training, decreasing standards of training	96
10.	Deepening moral crisis, social disintegration	71
11.	Social and ethnic problems, segregatums	60
12.	Low standards of healthcare and social services	44
13.	Settlement-geographical characteristics (locality, peripheral location, small-village structure)	43
14.	Lack of financial subsiding, deficient financial condition of local governments	40
15.	Lack of touristic developments, weak tourism	33
16.	Difficulties in sales, low engross price for agricultural products, extremely low profitability of economic activities	32
17.	Problems in management and decision making (lack of information for local management, weak capability for enforcement of interests, self-interest of lobbying forces, lack of will of government)	28
18.	Lack of quality public services, cultural , educational and sports facilities and public scenes	28
19.	Low level of co-operation	27
20.	Lacking conceptions for enhancing economy	22
21.	Lack of equal opportunities	12
22.	Lack of a young, creative intelligentsia, and experts able to manage programmes; lack of forcefulness in the civic sphere, low participation rate in public affairs	11
23.	Politics (political disintegration, lack of differentiated policies)	10
24.	Draining effect of cities with a municipal/county authority strongly felt	6

In our opinion, local persons have an appropriate impression of their own conditions and problems. It is interesting that in spite of the fact that they perceive the phenomena of the social and moral crisis, and that its predominance is unquestionable, these phenomena can be found in a cluster in answers 7-12., following the economic difficulties. This fact indicates that the weight of local problems has not been recognised at its whole extent.

Finally we evaluated the projects which had been accepted for support. Despite the fact that limitariness is a general feature of MD regions; their problems were in a decisive relation with the cutting-off of the relationship system across the borders, there is only one out of the hundreds of accepted projects which deals with this problem utterly (KURILLA. – OROSZ – PAP, 2009). Human programmes potentially contributing to social integration had come out rather weak. Almost none of the innovative programmes able to compensate for social disintegration had been accepted (e.g. the *Micro-regional Universitas* programme developed exclusively for this purpose).

III. The tasks of education in development

By the experience of micro-regional planning, most problems occur in connection with unemployment and the related underqualification, and – inclusively – with the underlying drop-out from education. Micro-regional leaders consider lack of human resources, the lack of a layer with secondary and higher education that would be able to control changes as innovative agents, as an important factor of underdevelopment. The questions of low standards of education, the poor quality of public education and insufficient infrastructure arise as well.

Experience in planning show that, a massive layer of marginalised people have evolved, being on the periphery of society with low qualifications, permanently out of the workforce market, living in poverty as a result of the social-economic changes relating to the change of regime. These living conditions have a seriously negative impact on the childhood socialisation of the new generations and lead to disadvantages that are very difficult to reduce later. Educators are forced to face serious difficulties and special pedagogical problems, when they have not received sufficient professional and methodological implements and approaches during their training, and schools are not provided with even the most elementary conditions of efficient educational work in many cases. These problems have been emphasised in all micro-regions. The above problems at micro-regional level are manifested by a high rate of drop-outs and ethnic segregation.

Reducing drop-out in elementary and secondary education, proposals for promoting talent management and training for educators with a special professional attainment

- **Educational work needs modifications in content** so that individual institutes could be able to educate disadvantaged pupils and students more efficiently. It can be encouraged by the central government in the framework of **normative additional subsidy** and tendering system by its claims made on local programmes and by further means of support, and some curbs can be built in the system as well. The applicability of financing methods varies by the levels of education. In our opinion, financing the owner of the school is a viable way primarily for primary schools and pre-school education; secondary and higher education answers to be encouraged by **individual support**. However, in case of primary and pre-school education, the problems of education disadvantaged pupils are varied, therefore the same form of assistance not necessarily will be successful in both cases.
- **A special financing source** should be allocated in case of schools involving **remediation programmes** in their programmes and curricula, which could ensure the procurement of equipment. Educators attending such training should gain benefits (number of lessons, income). For the realisation of remediation programmes classes should be divided into smaller groups (not optionally; it should be compulsory).
- Providing schools with **school counsellors/psychologists** with appropriate expertise.
- Employing **professional social workers**.
- The key for educating disadvantaged pupils is **advanced educator training**. It should be achieved for every educator to attend compulsory advanced training courses. There are two solutions possible: it may be incorporated in the existing compulsory 7-year-period training system, by **making the choice of at least one pedagogy/methodology course mandatory**. A solution should be included in teachers' responsibilities as a new advanced training course. The expenses of the training would be ensured by the government.
- Consequently, it would be advisable to bind the range of training courses on offer to a stricter accreditation procedure.

- For schools to be able to apply new pedagogical methods different from the recent practice, central government should support the **development and promotion of developmental pedagogy methods** in specialised institutes.
- It would be reasonable to follow up the application of the knowledge gained at advanced training courses in practice more efficiently. This process needs reconsidering and re-establishing the present quality control system affecting the whole of the education system that can be regarded as unsuccessful.
- There are several ways to **interest educators** via financial motivation. This procedure requires an objective means of measurement or observing the evaluation provided by the school-inspection system mentioned above. Criteria should include reducing the number of drop-out students.
- The other way: **rewarding** teachers in the form of extra stipend or by lesson allowances.
- The above can be joined by a **mentoring teacher** system where the task is following up on individual lives, assisting students and talent management, and the teachers' work can be remunerated depending on the outcome
- Another method can be suggested to increase educator interest: to **support self-organisation** of schools compensating for drop-outs and disadvantages after the followers of **inclusive pedagogy**, observing self-developing school models.
- Additional, capitation-style subsidies paid for local governments can mean only a weak motivation.
- The topic of learning organisation procedures is connected to the **renewal of teacher training**. A motivation system for professionally and pedagogically provided students should be introduced.
- The conditions of drop-out students can be improved not only by educators and school life and the transformation of institutional culture. This question can be approached by the topics of students and educational scheduling. Foreign experience is provided for the solution as well: it is made possible for **drop-outs to visit school with a flexible schedule**, on days and at times which are suitable for them.
- **Education in a module system**, extending the duration of learning can also mean a solution; flexible adaptation to individual needs and demands can provide motivation not only in case of those exposed to failure.

- **Individual support, grants** offer a suitable solution for the **further education** of students in disadvantage. Financing system must provide an opportunity for individual further education, the government should increase the inclination for further education.
- Another solution for improving the conditions of students in a disadvantaged situation is the **improvement of a boarding-school system**, where each student would have an individual adult mentor to help him/her adapt, to share problems with, to give useful advice. Social workers also can be employed.
- Reforms and regulations aimed at reducing learning failures of students with multiple disadvantages include an already existing **pre-school programme, especially in micro-regions populated by a high proportion of the Roma**.
- An opportunity for **flexible, prolonged start, day-long schools** should be introduced at the primary level.

IV. Recommendations

1. The utilisation of targeted resources is a simple and welcome method.
2. The perspective of an economic rise is illusory; nearly all conditions are lacking – in case of MD micro-regions the aim can be ensuring liveability.
3. Each micro-region should thread an own path at its peculiar rate.

“You can’t fix in 1-4 years what have gone wrong in 200 years”

4. Local societies recognised only partly that their integrity has been damaged seriously; they are disintegrated, so-called “wrecked societies”.
5. The philosophy of development should be placed on a moral basis, on completely different social and individual motivation.
6. Enter a personal consultation / technical assistance opportunities
7. Realization real development tips and ideas
8. The separation of professional and political communication.

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